

SERVING IN THE KINGDOM: A VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF EFL LITERACY IN TONGA

By

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## ABSTRACT

### SERVING IN THE KINGDOM: A VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFL LITERACY IN TONGA

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For three years I had the privilege of living and serving in the Kingdom of Tonga, a group of islands in the South Pacific, as a Master's International Program student and Peace Corps volunteer. In Tonga, I worked as an English Literacy Facilitator, partnering with counterparts on diverse projects to improve English language and literacy instruction in local schools.

In the most recent revision of its national curriculum, one of the sustainable development goals of the Tongan Ministry of Education is for teachers to learn strategies for the effective use of libraries, books, and technological resources in their teaching. To assist with this goal, for my first two years of service, I was asked to develop a central library and library practices for the primary school where I was posted, as well as teaching or co-teaching supplemental lessons using library resources for students in grades 3 through 8. In my third year, I served in a book publishing company, the Waka Publications Programme at the University of the South Pacific, as editor, researcher and author of English texts for Tongan students. My work at Waka was also tailored to meet the Ministry of Education's goal, as I would be helping to develop contextualized and effective resources that would be easily accessible for Tongan teachers' use.

In the “Introduction” of this M.A. Project, I briefly review prior experiences which prepared me for my service. In “Pre-service Coursework and Training,” I discuss my coursework in the first year of the Master’s International Program (MIP) at Humboldt State University (HSU) and my first two months of Peace Corps training upon arrival in Tonga. In the first section of “Primary and Middle School Service,” I portray the context in which I lived and worked during my first two years of service. In the second section of this chapter, I detail my work in developing a library, and the challenges and successes of this project. In “Waka Projects and Peace Corps Committee Work,” I shift to my third year of service, and give an overview of the literacy-related projects I worked on with Waka Publications and with Peace Corps Tonga. In the “Conclusion,” I examine my own development over three years of service in Tonga and reflect on what the experience taught me.

Over these three years, I learned about the overarching emphasis in Tongan culture on cultivating relationships. At the primary and middle school, I found that my efforts towards sustainable work in literacy development were more successful as I dedicated more time to building friendships with my counterparts. At Waka, the importance of relationships was highlighted through effective projects done in partnerships with local people. These experiences taught me that sustainable literacy development in Tonga *must* be built on a foundation which honors the Tongan values of humility, kindness, respect, and generosity.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2014, I began the Master's International Program (MIP) at Humboldt State University (HSU). With this program, I would complete a year of coursework in ESL/EFL teaching, undergo two months of Peace Corps training in the country I would serve in for two years as a teacher trainer, and finally, return to HSU to write a culminating project to achieve a Master's Degree in English: Peace Corps Service with TEFL Emphasis. This M.A. project is an analysis of and reflection on my experiences as a volunteer and how my MIP training, along with prior training, prepared me for my service in my eventual role of English Literacy Facilitator.

Three years earlier, I had just completed my coursework for a California teaching credential, a year after attaining my B.A. in English, which I had begun right after high school. Degree and credential in hand, I moved to Colombia and secured a position as an EFL teacher for almost 250 students at a pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade private school in Medellin.

This school's philosophy, as I understood it, was that individual learners' success depended upon genuine student-centered education. Each student had a personalized education plan and worked independently under the supervision of a tutor in a workshop of up to 22 students. Further, their philosophy considered that literacy was the one skill students could develop to enhance all other skills.

As the English tutor (this private school used the title "tutor" for its teachers), I had to develop a literacy-focused curriculum that balanced the four skills of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. There was an existing English curriculum meant

to teach the grammar and structure of the English language, and my four-skills curriculum was meant to be taught parallel to, though separate from, the grammar curriculum. For the grammar curriculum, each student worked at her/his own pace in workbooks that led them through translating texts from English to Spanish, each text building upon the last. Our class time was spent partly on these workbooks, and partly on my four-skills curriculum, which included group activities, games and mini-lessons on grammar, vocabulary and other topics. I saw the positive results as each student began to pick up, through the process of reading and translating in the workbooks, the ability to use new words and phrases in spoken and written form. My students' success through this independent learning proved to me the *fundamental importance* of literacy skills, a conviction which would lead me to seek further work in literacy education when I eventually returned to the United States.

Upon returning to California after my time in Colombia, I sought a job with the Institute of Reading Development (IRD), a private institute whose stated goal was to "help students of all ages and backgrounds build the reading skills they needed to immerse themselves in great books and develop a lifelong love of reading" (Copperman). The initial interview process for the IRD sought to gauge my personal investment in reading and books, in the worlds and wonder of excellent literature, and in whether I could effectively impart that investment to a group of learners. Once I was hired on as a tutor (the IRD also called their teachers "tutors"), following a month of intensive training, I spent the summer months of 2015 teaching reading skills to groups of students ranging from preschoolers to adults.



The IRD's lessons provided me with an opportunity to teach research-based, student-centered, literacy development curricula. I was able to compare these lessons to the literacy development lessons I had created for my EFL students in Colombia, and recognize flaws and gaps in my first attempts. Foremost of these was the lack of structure in my literacy instruction; I worked one-on-one with several students using read-aloud books on EFL websites, but I often let them pick the books based on their interest in the cover art or their ability to easily read the title. One student, for example, spent weeks reading books focused on 3-letter consonant-vowel-consonant words, such as "cat" and "jig," until I realized that he was picking them because they were easy, even though he was able to decode higher-level vocabulary.

With the IRD curricula I could perceive how lessons shifted and progressed at each level, and evaluate how learners at each level interacted with and *succeeded* in that curriculum. Their curriculum also exposed readers to a variety of text genres, such as narrative, non-fiction and academic textbooks. In retrospect, my students in Colombia would have benefited from more directed reading instruction, especially reading in successively higher-level and varied texts, and instruction in reading strategies. I carried this understanding of learners' literacy development at progressive levels into my first year in the MIP, and later to my service in Tonga. In my MIP coursework, we reviewed research that supported this type of leveled, guided, and genre-diverse reading instruction for English Second Language (ESL) and English Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

This learning would play a major role in my Peace Corps service, which was mostly concerned with literacy development. Unlike the majority of my peers who went

through the Master's International program at HSU, I did not serve as an EFL teacher trainer, as was initially intended. Rather, due to the nature of the project that Peace Corps Tonga was (and is still) carrying out, the focus of my service from 2015-18 was literacy education, with three specific goals for sustainable development: "Improve Teachers' Skills," "Improve Literacy Skills of Class 3-8 Students," and "Increase Community Involvement in Literacy Activities" (Peace Corps Tonga 2-3). The official job title for volunteers in this project was "English Literacy Facilitator."

Because of Peace Corps Tonga's literacy focus, I worked primarily with and through one medium: books. From 2015-17 I was posted at the Vaini Government Primary and Middle School (GPS and GMS), in the town of Vaini, in the central region of the island of Tongatapu, where I served mainly as librarian, resource specialist, and English language co-teacher. Early on in my service I also learned about a local publishing company called the Waka Publications Programme and met the program lead, Dr. Ruth Toumu'a. I was so impressed by Dr. Ruth and the work she was doing with Waka, particularly in partnering successfully with local artists, authors, and organizations to create contextualized literacy resources, that I decided to extend my service for a third year in order to work at Waka, helping to create books and resources for students and educators in Pacific languages and in English. At Waka Publications, I worked as an editor, author and researcher.

What had initially drawn me to Waka Publications was an impression that their work was truly *sustainable*. From exposure to the term during my MIP coursework and initial Peace Corps training, I had created my own understanding of "sustainable

development.” Before ever arriving in Tonga, I had also theorized about what sustainable literacy development – based on my literacy teaching experiences – would look like during my service. This understanding would evolve over the next few years as I began to value *tauhivaha’a*, the importance, in Tongan culture, of nurturing interpersonal relationships, which would strengthen working partnerships and support sustainable development.

The following chapter, “Pre-Service Coursework and Training,” opens with an account of my first two semesters of HSU coursework. The focus is on pedagogical methods and strategies from TESL/TEFL research that I could apply to my work as an EFL teacher and EFL teacher trainer during my Peace Corps service. The second section of this chapter recounts my initial Peace Corps training with my trainee group over a two-month period in a village in Tonga. Building from the previous section, I turn a critical eye towards our training sessions from the perspective of my recent coursework, particularly in foreign language development and in teacher training. Throughout this narrative, I include intermittent insights into my emerging notion of sustainable development.

The next two chapters, “Primary and Middle School Service” and “Waka Projects and Peace Corps Committee Work” detail the literacy-related work I took part in at my sites, and I reflect on the challenges I faced and the ultimate processes that led to successful projects. In the “Conclusion” chapter of this M.A. Project, I detail several experiences which solidified my understanding of Tongan cultural values, and helped to close my service on a promising note.

## PRE-SERVICE COURSEWORK AND TRAINING

### Pre-Service Coursework

I began my coursework at Humboldt State University in the fall of 2014 with four courses. In the following section, I give details from three of those courses which I believed would be directly applicable to my service. These three courses were English 328: Structure of American English, English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language, and Sociology 650: Race, Ethnicity and Gender.

My English 328: Structure of American English professor taught grammar in a different way than my previous grammar professors. During my English degree and credential programs I had been taught grammar through the traditional prescriptive method, but in this course we studied it through the descriptive method. The textbook, *Navigating English Grammar*, by Anne Lobeck and Kristin Denham, contrasted these methods in their first chapter: “we will explore and describe language data, data that reveals your intuitive knowledge of grammar. This scientific approach to the study of grammar will be different from the more familiar ‘school’ approach, in which you learn grammar and usage rules” (2). Learning the structure of language intuitively via authentic language was exactly what my students in Colombia had done in their workbooks. I realized that I had seen this method in action and I knew that it worked, and now I would learn how to put it into practice.

In *Navigating English Grammar*, each section would provide several clauses or sentences using a similar structure, and the learner would compare and contrast these sentences to create a hypothesis about the underlying grammar principle, then test the hypothesis by writing new sentences. This strategy pointed to a direct connection between reading and writing. Through extensive reading in texts that used the same structures (leveled readers, for example), learners could intuit a language's grammar structures and inevitably begin to imitate these in their writing.

The link between reading and writing skills was addressed explicitly in my English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language course. In this course we studied types of second or foreign language learners and factors that affect their learning, as well as strategies and methods used to teach second or foreign language. In one of our course textbooks, *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language*, Douglas Brown states: "your goals [as a teacher] will be best achieved by capitalizing on the connection between reading and other modes of performance, especially the reading-writing relationship" (357). This relationship was undoubtedly positive, with effective reading instruction leading to improvement in writing performance. Brown also cautioned, however, that reading instruction must include explicit skills training: "We often assume that they [ESL students] will learn good reading simply by absorption through generous offerings of extensive reading opportunities. In reality, there is much to be gained by focusing on reading skills" (373). In English 435/635, we studied specific strategies to build and refine literacy development. These strategies dealt with reading skills such as speed, fluency, and

comprehension. Coming into the MIP, I was familiar with these strategies from my teaching experience with the IRD the summer before. The IRD curricula had been designed by educators and based on past and current research on literacy development. As a tutor for the IRD, I had taught classes for parents and their preschool-aged children; classes for first and second graders; classes for third and fourth graders; classes for fifth and sixth graders; classes for seventh and eighth graders; classes for ninth, tenth and eleventh graders; and classes for adult readers. The curricula for each of these levels had covered reading skills targeted to the specific ages and reading abilities of the learners at that level. In English 435/635, we also looked at research, such as by Spargo (1989) on developing reading skills, and the strategies Spargo described were some which I had taught to my middle school, high school and adult learners. For example, a method that Spargo called “pacing drills,” I had taught to my IRD students as “fluency drills.” These involved readers tracking their rate of words-per-minute and trying to increase that rate through timed drills. In my upcoming Peace Corps service, I would not have many teaching opportunities to apply advanced strategies for developing reading speed, fluency and comprehension; my service at the Vaini primary school involved little direct instruction, and when it did, the focus was on phonetics and vocabulary. On the other hand, my library development work at Vaini as well as my book writing and editing at Waka Publications would make use of my understanding of appropriate texts for learners at specific reading levels, such as knowing what words and structures were accessible to learners at certain stages of their literacy development.

Choosing appropriate texts for learners required not only attention to vocabulary and grammar, but also careful analysis of the cultural assumptions of each text; in English 435/635, we also addressed this issue. In *Teaching by Principles*, Brown pointed out that “the reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture... to the printed word” (358). To capitalize on this wealth of existing knowledge, effective reading instruction – and *any* instruction – needed be contextualized to the students’ worldviews. The mandate, however, was not only to capitalize on this knowledge, but also to respect it. Brown cautioned that: “our learners must be free to be themselves, to think for themselves... to cherish their beliefs and traditions and cultures without the threat of forced change (Benesch, 2001; Edge, 1996; Norton & Toohey, 2004)” (514). Looking ahead to my Peace Corps service, these principles would be essential to my work in the Vaini school library, where it would be a constant challenge to select relevant texts for my students when the vast majority of our materials had come from overseas donations and were contextualized to foreign learners, drawing from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In my third year at Waka Publications, the challenge would be much more personal; in my editing and writing, I needed to avoid infusing texts with ways of thinking that differed from those valued in the country and region I was in, for example, encouraging individualism and pride in oneself over community and relationships.

Some of the course content in English 435/635 was familiar from my coursework for my teaching credential, though in this course we studied it in much more detail. An example of this was the “Methods Project,” which involved employing one of eight

language teaching methods to teach a 15-minute lesson on a foreign language to the rest of the class. Though I recognized these eight methods, my prior coursework had dealt mainly with the methods which the professors deemed useful for modern teaching (the Silent Way and Suggestopedia, for example, were glossed over as outdated). Two methods which I had worked with extensively in my credential coursework were Content-Based Instruction and Task-based Language Teaching. In *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, our other English 435/635 textbook, Larsen-Freeman and Andersen called Content-Based Instruction the “strong version of the Communicative Approach,” which “asserts that language is acquired through communication” (131) as it “integrates the learning of language with the learning of some other content... [often] academic subject matter” (132). In Task-based Language Teaching, “[a]s the students seek to complete the task, they have to work to understand each other and to express their own thoughts... they have to check to see if they have comprehended correctly and, at times, they have to seek clarification” (149).

I had also used some of these methods, or elements from them, in my teaching in Colombia. The Total Physical Response method, for example, had been a favorite, and I had built a whole unit for teaching prepositions and directions largely using this method (as well as a task-based approach); it involved a culminating activity of getting through an obstacle course in which students were paired up and one student was blindfolded, and the other student had to guide his/her partner through the obstacle course by giving very specific directions (such as, “take three long steps forward”) and ensuring the student never bumped into anything, or they would have to start over.



I had also used strategies from Communicative Language Teaching and Content-based Instruction with my advanced middle and high school students, who had English Conversation classes with me; I would pick a relevant topic or task with a set of questions (usually from a TEFL website) for an open-ended discussion, and these would fill our class conversation time. For example, one discussion was on the students' beliefs about and experiences with the supernatural. In another lesson, a task they completed was to fill out a questionnaire about living with roommates and then they discussed their preferences with classmates until they found someone who, according to the questionnaire results, would be a suitable roommate for them. This approach was successful for these classes because the students felt safe in their small groups, usually between ten and fifteen students, and because we would begin each class with pre-teaching activities like creating a thematic vocabulary list, which built their confidence to participate in the discussions.

Coming into English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language, I had these prior experiences to draw from for our study of language teaching methods. One method with which I was not familiar, however, was the Audio-Lingual Method. Larsen-Freeman and Andersen describe the Audio-Lingual Method as an “oral-based approach” which “drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns” (35). I remembered this method as one of the more “outdated methods” introduced in prior coursework for my teaching credential. In this course, however, we learned about the usefulness of the method for teaching correct pronunciation as well as for building a set of useful phrases for beginning learners to master (and also build confidence), such as

“Hello, how are you?” and “I’m fine, thank you.” This overview of the Audio-Lingual Method would serve me during my time at the primary school in Tonga, as this was the main method used to teach language at the school. I would need to be attuned to the students’ familiarity and comfort with learning through this method, in order to also teach them in a way which would feel accessible to them.

In English 435/635, we also studied the history of, issues in, and strategies for vocabulary teaching. In our class packet, for example, we read a chapter titled “Vocabulary Learning and Teaching,” by Jeanette S. DeCarrico, published in the 2001 textbook *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. DeCarrico brought together current research to assert that: “learners should initially be taught a large productive vocabulary of at least two thousand high frequency words” (115). This research pointed to the need for new words to “be presented in contexts rich enough to provide clues to meaning and that students be given multiple exposure to items” (116).

DeCarrico’s chapter also supported a vocabulary teaching approach that stresses the connections among related words (*run*, *runner*, and *running*, for example) as well as the connections among words with related meanings (*run*, *sprint*, and *dash*, for example). To capitalize on learners’ understanding of the meaning of a word, DeCarrico suggested that “teachers help students learn to recognize clues to guessing word meaning from context,” (118). In my English Conversation classes in Colombia described above, teaching new words in context was the impetus for putting together the thematic vocabulary list prior to each discussion. Douglas Brown also insisted on contextualized vocabulary instruction in *Teaching By Principles*, pointing out that: “learners can benefit

from attending to vocabulary within a communicative framework in which items appear” (436).

For a lexical approach, DeCarrico proposed teaching “lexical phrases,” which she defined as “conventionalized form/function composites that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together from scratch” (123). These could be the same kinds of phrases as those used in the Audio-Lingual Method discussed above. Incidentally, along with the Audio-Lingual Method and lexical phrases, our professor presented Carolyn Graham’s “Jazz Chants,” a method for teaching natural rhythm and stress for the words which make up a lexical phrase.

DeCarrico also mentioned mnemonic devices, cognates, and language notebooks, three strategies which can help students commit new words to memory. She also introduced collocations, idioms, and corpus studies; our professor elaborated on all of these elements with research from other sources. Corpus studies as well as high-frequency vocabulary lists, in particular, were topics we discussed extensively in English 435/635. Of databases built through corpus studies, DeCarrico explained that they “allow access to a variety of samples from language as it is actually used in real-world settings in a wide range of genres” (123).

Our professor introduced us to several widely used corpora, concordancers, and lists for teaching English vocabulary, such as COCA (the Corpus of Contemporary American English) and COBUILD (the Collins-Birmingham University International Language Database, who publish the Collins Dictionary), which were both available online. We also learned about Michael West’s *General Service List of English Words*

listing high-frequency words, Paul Nation's *Academic Word List* of low-frequency words, Averil Coxhead's update of Paul Nation's list, called the *New Academic Word List*, and Edward William Dolch's *Dolch Sight Words List*. While the *General Service List* and the *Dolch Sight Words* list were meant for use with beginning English learners, Nation's and Coxhead's academic lists were geared specifically to learners in academic settings, especially adult learners at the tertiary levels.

I had not worked with adult English second or foreign language learners either in Colombia or in the IRD. Throughout the fall semester in English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language, each of us was paired with a student from the university's International English Language Institute as a conversation partner. This activity was a chance to interact with an English language learner who was also my peer, and apply what was being taught in English 435/635 to help the learner with his or her learning process on an informal basis. I was paired with a Japanese student who had had several years of English language instruction, and wanted to improve her confidence in speaking and listening comprehension. In English 435/635 class meetings, the class discussed elements of these interactions; one major element was that of a learner's "willingness to communicate" and "language ego," addressed in Douglas Brown's chapter on teaching speaking. I learned to pay attention to my partner's behavior and mood as she expressed herself, both through speech and physical clues, to judge what I would address for correction. This active and sensitive attention to her language ego helped me develop appropriate attitudes for later English interactions with my co-teachers in Tonga.

In this first semester of my MIP coursework, I was also able to take a Sociology course which would better prepare me for intercultural interactions (this course was taken in lieu of English 417: Second Language Acquisition, which covered material I had learned through my credential coursework). This course, Sociology 650: Race, Ethnicity and Gender, was my first in-depth exposure to academic writing on race and racism, queer theory, and gender studies, through authors such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Dorothy Roberts, Ann Laura Stoler and Chandra Mohanty.

As a final project for Sociology 650, I researched and wrote a paper on the ethical implications of teaching English in a foreign country as a Peace Corps volunteer. I read critical pieces on the history of the Peace Corps and its foundation and mission; the underlying messages it conveys through its websites, magazines and adverts; the demographics and other statistics from the Peace Corps (and their implications); and U.S. government and World Bank objectives, both stated and unstated, for development work in so-called “third-world” countries, particularly in regards to English language education. I came away from this project with the urgency of approaching my volunteer service humbly and respectfully, with the resolve to listen first, to hear what was wanted from me and what was not, and most importantly to immerse myself in the culture I was going to and to defer to their cultural values in my life and work.

During the break between the Fall 2014 semester and the Spring 2015 semester, I received word from the Peace Corps that I would be placed in the Kingdom of Tonga. As I read through the introductory materials from Peace Corps Tonga, it became clear that I would most likely be placed at a government primary school. I also found out that

students in Tongan government schools did not begin to learn English until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I felt that my fall semester focus on grammar teaching techniques and advanced literacy development strategies would need to shift to concepts that would be taught at introductory levels of English learning. I based this on my experience in teaching EFL in Colombia, where I had worked with transfer students in the upper primary grades who had not had prior English instruction; these students had needed to be taught basic concepts such as English phonetics and morphology, as well as needing to build a base of English words and phrases, before ever being introduced to advanced grammar topics.

Coming into the Spring 2015 semester, I held fast to my resolve to honor the people I would be serving, now knowing this would be the people of Tonga. I prepared for this through my courses, namely English 436: Integrating Language and Content in English Instruction; English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing; and English 684: Internship in Teaching ESL.

As I began the coursework for English 436: Integrating Language and Content in English Instruction, it became apparent that much of the material covered (and even the required texts) overlapped with prior coursework I had done for my teaching credential. Instead of repeating this work, my professor offered me the opportunity to do a literature review on Tongan culture and education. I checked out every potentially relevant book about Tonga that I could acquire from the library and through interlibrary loan and spent the next few months reading through these. For historical background I read *Kinship to Kingship: Gender Hierarchy and State Formation in the Tongan Islands* (1987), by Christine Ward Gailey; *Early Tonga as the Explorers Saw it 1616-1810* (1987), by Edwin

N. Ferndon; *The Art of Tonga* (1997), by Keith St. Cartmail; *Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga* (1977), by Noel Rutherford; and *Tongan Society at the Time of Captain Cook's Visits: Discussions with her Majesty Queen Salōte Tupou* (1982), by Elizabeth Bott and Tavi. For more current context I read *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood* (1996), by Helen Morton, and *Voyages: From Tongan Villages to American Suburbs* (2011), by Cathy A. Small. From these I began to form an understanding of Tongan culture, yet I could not ignore the fact that none, except the books by Bott and Small, contained authentic Tongan voices.

*Kinship to Kingship* offered insight into familial relationships, as well as traditions, taboos and expectations for women and men. *The Art of Tonga* gave some context to the physical and material world in Tonga. Finally, *Becoming Tongan* gave an account of pregnancy, motherhood and child rearing in Tonga, from the perspective of a white woman married to a Tongan man, bringing up their male child in her husband's family home. Among other things, *Becoming Tongan* raised the issue of corporal punishment and its prevalence in Tongan homes and schools; I was glad of this exposure, which saved me from shock in my early experiences with it in Tonga.

Parallel to working my way through the texts on Tonga, I got an advanced course in linguistics, with the guidance of my professor. I read through *How Language Works: An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, by Carol Genetti and *Essential Linguistics: What You Need to Know to Teach*, by David E. Freeman and Yvonne S. Freeman. To pursue my interest in researching vocabulary teaching, I read *The Vocabulary Book: Learning and Instruction*, by Michael F. Graves. These three texts were meant to further

my understanding of the smaller bits of language, mainly phonemes, letters, morphemes and words.

The concept that I was most drawn to in my research was that of “word consciousness,” from Michael Graves’ *Vocabulary Book*. Graves presented word consciousness as a goal of vocabulary instruction, meant to lead students “to gain a deep appreciation of words and to value them” (119). According to Graves, the concept was supported by research on “the importance of motivation” and “the importance of metalinguistic awareness” (32). This concept gave a name to an innate feeling I had had about vocabulary, about a love of words. My final research paper for the course brought together Graves’ methodology, which includes “modeling, recognizing, and encouraging adept diction,” “promoting word play,” “providing rich and expressive instruction,” “involving students in original investigations,” and “teaching students about words,” with other relevant research, to develop for myself a set of strategies and methods for teaching vocabulary and fostering word consciousness in my future Tongan students.

During English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing, I was also able to continue my research into phonetics and vocabulary instruction. This was not a focus of the course content, but as my final project would center on EFL vocabulary teaching, I was able to do extensive research into the topic. I began my efforts with articles on the importance of phonological awareness (PA) on second language (L2) development. One major point that became clear early on was the importance of learners’ phonological awareness in their *first* language. As I read in a study by Chien, Kao and Wei: “linguistic skills learned in L1 help develop linguistic skills in L2, especially PA in younger learners



(e.g. Chow *et al.*, 2005; Lopez & Greenfield, 2004)” (285). The authors’ attention to “younger learners” implied that PA development was particularly important at the elementary level. They stressed that “the development of PA may be critical for the early years of young EFL learners” (283), and that this development needed to occur through “specific training” (285). I was learning that in order for my future Tongan students to begin gaining phonological awareness in English, they would first need an understanding of PA in their native language, Tongan. I felt I would need to adapt my phonetics and vocabulary instruction to the context, according to the sort and depth of training in PA that Tongan teachers, at the preschool and first grade levels, were providing for their students.

The actual course content for English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing built on that of English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language, in describing ESL/EFL learners, but English 614 focused specifically on reading and writing development, the relationship between reading and writing skills, and the effects of students’ native languages on their learning of these skills in English. We used two textbooks for this course, the second edition of *Teaching and Researching Reading* by William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller, and the third edition of *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* by Dana R. Ferris and John S. Hedgcock.

In the introduction to the second edition of their text, Grabe and Stoller made the case for ESL literacy development on a global scale: “L2 reading ability, particularly with English as the L2, is already in great demand as English continues to spread, not only as a global language but also as the language of science, technology and advanced

research” (xiv). This statement was particularly fitting to describe the educational context in Tonga; I had learned that, beginning in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the curriculum shifted entirely to English with the exception of two subjects, Tongan language and Tongan culture. This drastic shift at the secondary level pointed to the pressure to prepare Tongan students for advanced English language demands at the tertiary level. I assumed this was because their tertiary-level curriculum had been imported from western countries, and the textbooks and materials were written for native speakers of English.

With its focus on reading, Grabe and Stoller’s text would have been exceptionally useful for training teachers in literacy development work. In the third section of the book, for example, “Teaching reading using evidence-based practices,” the authors offered concise lists of twelve abilities that students can develop towards becoming skilled readers (130); “nine curricular principles for reading instruction” (132); “sample activities used in different stages of a reading lesson” (133); “comprehension monitoring strategies” (143); and “strategies employed by good readers while reading for careful comprehension” (146). Although many of their examples of these principles and strategies in action were for teaching advanced learners, the information in the tables was presented in general form and could be adapted for English learners at any level (and, arguably, for teaching reading in any language). Nonetheless, at Vaini, given that I would not be teaching often or leading teacher training, I would only be able to apply these principles on few occasions; in the next chapter, “Primary and Middle School Service,” I detail these occasions and how strategies from Grabe and Stoller’s text came into play.

Ferris and Hedgcock's *Teaching L2 Composition* covered every aspect of writing instruction: context, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, feedback, and of course, the reading-writing relationship. Their text, even more than Grabe and Stoller's, was concerned with advanced learners (those who were able to write coherent chunks of text, like paragraphs and essays). In the following chapter, I detail one instance when I was able to apply, or at least reflect on, some of my learning from this text.

In *Teaching L2 Composition* we also learned about "error analysis," which I would get a chance to do in my third year at Waka Publications; in Ferris and Hedgcock's text we looked at tables of error categories (304 and 315) and strategies for conducting error analysis of student writing in order to "diagnose the linguistic needs of a particular class" (313). For this topic, we also looked at research by Stephen Doolan and Donald Miller published in 2012. In *Generation 1.5 written error patterns: A comparative study*, we reviewed "Appendix E" (18), in which the authors listed the categories of error types in writing; their table was organized a bit differently than those in Ferris and Hedgcock, with certain of the categories in Ferris and Hedgcock's tables broken down further in Doolan and Miller's as well as lengthier descriptions of each error category provided. The study itself focused specifically on a type of English learner ("generation 1.5") who did not fit neatly into either the ESL learner or EFL learner types, yet they "face similar educational challenges with respect to negotiating the use of (a) their home language and (b) their language of formal schooling" (2). Although I would not have many opportunities to use the strategies from Ferris and Hedgcock and Doolan and Miller in

my work at Vaini, this introduction to the field of error analysis did come in handy with my work in the error analysis project at Waka Publications.

For my final course, English 684: Internship in Teaching ESL, I had the opportunity to partner with a veteran ESL teacher from the College of the Redwoods, and serve as her teaching assistant once a week in an adult ESL course. It was my first experience observing an ESL teacher in action, and she was an outstanding example. She was caring, creative, and engaging; she scaffolded her lessons carefully and intuitively to build upon one another, with clear progressions from topic to topic and from easier to more difficult material; and she knew how to manage her resources and use her environment. Her lessons also included activities to encourage interaction among students of different levels. The students' interaction fostered a sense of ownership for their learning, and it also allowed students to work together in translating different concepts to and from their native languages, as well as share ideas and opinions from their own backgrounds. As the teacher's assistant, I was able to work closely with these adult learners, and my understanding of "language ego" and of the emotional dimensions of communicating in a second language continued to mature.

At the end of these two semesters, I felt that I had a solid foundation for my upcoming work in Tonga. I felt prepared to share student-centered strategies for teaching phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar; for training students in literacy; for building up their love of reading; and for creating lessons, units and even entire curricula. More importantly, I felt prepared to interact respectfully with Tongan people, and to serve in whatever capacity they may need.

## Peace Corps Training

I arrived in Tonga with Peace Corps trainee group number 80 (G80) in early September of 2015 – we would be known as “trainees” until our graduation to “volunteers” at the end of October. Our group was particularly small, with only fifteen members. We were placed with host families in a small village in the eastern district of the island of Tongatapu for our first two months in country. Every morning each of us walked to the village hall, where we met together with the Programming and Training (PT) team for our daily sessions, from 8 a.m. to around 5 p.m. Training was divided into technical sessions, safety and security and medical sessions, and language and culture sessions. Technical sessions were meant to prepare us for our work as English Language Facilitators. Safety and security and medical sessions were for survival and self-care. Language and culture sessions were for language tutoring in small groups, which also included discussions on local cultural practices, beliefs, and so on.

In the months before I departed for Tonga, I had received several handbooks from Peace Corps about their *Tonga English Literacy Project*, which I would eventually join as a Peace Corps Tonga volunteer. The *Tonga English Literacy Project* had begun in 2012, three years prior to my group’s arrival. In previous years, volunteers had served in several fields, including agriculture, infrastructure, medicine and education. Peace Corps Tonga’s shift to a project concentrated on English literacy development responded to a request from the Tongan Ministry of Education to provide support for their new primary school curriculum. The curriculum itself was a work in progress.

Apparently, Tongan educational leaders had felt in prior years that the national curricula, which had been imported and adapted from New Zealand, did not reflect Tongan values. The new primary curriculum aimed to build a solid foundation in Tongan language and culture. For this reason, English instruction, which had in the former curriculum begun in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, was pushed back to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, where children would be introduced to listening and speaking activities in their English class, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, where they would begin English reading and writing activities. In 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, students would continue to develop the four skills in English language. Starting in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, when they transferred to the secondary curriculum, all of their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) classes would be taught in English. According to our *Volunteer Assignment Description*, Peace Corps volunteers in the *Tonga English Literacy Project* would work to “strengthen the English skills of Tongan primary children through student-centered activities in classroom and extra-curricular settings,” (5) and help “develop appropriate learning and assessment tools” (6).

As a Peace Corps Tonga trainee, I attended daily technical sessions with my fellow trainees. These technical sessions were designed to prepare us for the literacy work mentioned above, and I expected to encounter some of the same training materials as those used in my MIP coursework. Prior graduates of the HSU MIP in sites as varied as China, Micronesia, Colombia and Nicaragua had been trained for EFL teaching using Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, yet Peace Corps Tonga did not use this, or any other, outside textbooks; all of the texts used for our training had been recently published by Peace Corps Tonga. We were issued

several spiral bound textbooks, including a *Pre-Service Training Book* with a notes page for every session; an *Idea Book*, which detailed our Peace Corps Tonga goals; and an *Assessment Book* with activities for formal and informal English assessments for Class 3-8 students. Both the *Idea Book* and the *Assessment Book* were written and compiled with the help of Group 78 and 79 volunteers, based on their experiences. I am not sure with what materials these prior groups had been trained, but it seemed that they had identified the need for training materials and had taken the initiative to work with the Programming and Training team to create them. We also received a flash drive referred to as *The Flash*, with folders full of songs, games, worksheets, and lesson plans for teaching English (also compiled by current and former volunteers in the Literacy Project), as well as instructions and information on starting and maintaining a library following the current Tongan library systems (based on Dewey Decimal), and information on how to incorporate technology into lessons.

In our first few technical sessions, we were introduced to more details about the changes in the Ministry of Education's (MoE) curriculum, and about how we as Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) would be supporting these changes through our service work. Two of the MoE's main objectives for this process were 1) to embed Tongan values as the core of the curriculum, and 2) to train teachers to teach this curriculum using student-centered methods. Along with revisioning the curriculum, the MoE was also in the process of adapting its teacher training models to the new objectives. While recent graduates of the MoE's teacher training program were familiar with student-centered teaching methods, veteran teachers used the older model of teacher-centered lecturing

and rote memorization. Through the *Tonga English Literacy Project*, Peace Corps volunteers would serve as a bridge between the two objectives; volunteers would bring experience in student-centered teaching methods, while local counterparts (our Tongan co-workers) would bring knowledge of Tongan values.

Our trainers introduced us to six approaches for implementing co-teaching, described in the Peace Corps Tonga “Team-Teaching Techniques” handout adapted from Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook’s book *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (see Appendix A). The trainers stressed that in order for teachers to adapt to new teaching methods and approaches, they should experience these methods through observation and co-teaching. We discussed the positive and negative aspects of each technique, as detailed in the handout, as well as coming up with examples of how each of these methods could be applied in a particular lesson. Since none of us had visited a Tongan classroom at this point, we had to rely on our experiences back in the United States or overseas to imagine how using these techniques might play out.

In theory, PCVs and counterparts would work together in co-planning and co-teaching English lessons; through this, counterparts would learn to use student-centered methods and eventually incorporate them into every lesson they taught, especially after the PCVs had left. This would be our counterparts “taking ownership” of our joint projects; this would be *sustainable* development.

Beyond experience in student-centered methods, PCVs would also bring a native-speaker understanding of the English language, and familiarity with the most current EFL teaching strategies, such as a focus on phonological development, extensive reading at



appropriate levels, contextualized lessons, multi-modal learning, and methods such as task-based teaching, content-based teaching, and Total Physical Response. After the introductory sessions, technical sessions shifted to these topics. It was at this stage that our training encountered some issues.

Our Programming and Training (PT) team were mostly host country nationals (Peace Corps' terminology for "locals") and experienced veterans of Peace Corps Tonga; when our post's service project focus shifted to literacy in 2012, the PT team began the process of adapting their training program to this new project, led by the Director of Programming and Training (DPT), an American professional whose expertise was in adult literacy education. However, none of the PT team members had backgrounds specifically in primary or secondary EFL education. With the exception of our DPT and our Language Coordinator, the PT team members were not trained educators. This adversely affected my group's training. Unlike the past few trainee groups, Group 80 consisted almost entirely of people who had experience in education – some as tutors, some as teachers, and many specifically as EFL teachers. In the second week of training, we had several sessions where most of our group members were already well-versed in the material being taught. Many of us were also uncomfortable with the teacher-centered approach, as we sat through long Power Point presentations. Heeding our feedback, the PT team decided that, for the rest of our pre-service training, our group would shift to "self-training" for the technical sessions. The PT team would give us the topics and materials, and we would create, in small groups divided according to our skillsets and

experiences, our own technical sessions. These mini-sessions, led by our own group members, were effective and useful.

The PT team also brought in current volunteers (from G78 and G79) to sit in on our sessions and provide contextual insight and feedback, drawing on their experiences teaching in-country. For a session on classroom management, for example, one trainee had suggested putting on a “teacher face” and waiting for a room of rowdy students to notice the teacher’s stern demeanor and calm down. One of the current volunteers pointed out that many older Tongan teachers were of a generally stern demeanor, but this had no effect on student behavior. Another volunteer said that Tongan teachers often didn’t mind letting students be their rowdy selves. They explained that, unlike in the U.S., where students were expected to sit and work quietly throughout most of the school day, Tongan classrooms could be loud and unruly. One volunteer shared that chaos went so unchecked at his school that he had once gotten angry enough to cuff a student upside the head. While this seemed like a gaping breach of protocol for us American-trained educators, the volunteer added that counterparts who had seen him hit the student congratulated him warmly on finally being *faka-Tonga* (doing things the Tongan way).

Several of the G78 and G79 volunteers led sessions for my group (G80) in the village hall during our training. Three volunteers came and talked to us about the kinds of “naughty” things the students might do and the best ways to call students’ attention and get them to stop. They also talked about the practices of Tongan teachers of hitting and hissing/growling at students to correct their behavior, a behavior described in the book I had read a few months earlier. Current volunteers also presented on the PCV committees

we could join to work on our project goals, such as the Library Committee and the Sight Word Books Committee. Two volunteers who were beloved in their communities talked to us about what they did outside of school to integrate and become part of the community.

Aside from these sessions in the village hall, we also had a few field trip technical sessions at current volunteer sites, which gave a real-life and real-time perspective to our training. We visited three schools where volunteers had helped set up agricultural crops, meant to provide access to healthy foods for students and their families. Early on, we visited Vaini GPS and GMS where the volunteer couple, along with several other current volunteers, led a presentation on starting a library at a government primary school.

Although I would not know it until the end of October, Vaini would eventually become my site. At the Vaini primary school, the current volunteers had converted a large storeroom into the beginnings of a library with a few hundred books on four rickety shelves along the walls (see Appendix B). In this library, they led us through a hands-on activity on library design, and another activity on sorting and categorizing newly donated books, paying particular attention to their relevance for Tongan students and teachers as well as the physical state the books were in.

One very important thing I learned, indirectly, through these interactions with current volunteers, was that perhaps I would not be doing any teacher training of local teachers, after all. The actual situations of current volunteers at their sites underlined this reality. Many of the volunteers who had been here for a year or even two years were standalone English teachers. Some were resource specialists, supporting teachers in the

lesson planning stage. A few did co-planning and co-teaching with some of their counterparts. Some were English literacy teachers, leading only the reading activities. A very few led training sessions for their counterparts. And a very few were relegated to some space where they spent their time creating, printing, and laminating resources for the school. These snapshots of actual volunteer experiences provided the most insight for my upcoming service.

Living with a host family also provided context for future interactions with host country nationals. I lived in a house across the street from the church, on a small compound that contained the main family home, a cabin where my host mom's sister and her husband lived, and a small yard with an enclosure for Ms. Piggy, the Christmas sow, and a few wild chickens. My host mom worked at home most of the day while my host dad worked nearby in their family agricultural land, tending to a few rows of root crops and watermelon plants shaded by papaya, coconut and banana trees. My host mother's father lived in the room across from mine and liked to go on long, wandering bike rides during the day. The family's two eldest sons lived in a neighboring "boy's house" during my two-month stay, as it would be taboo for them to share the house with me (a single woman). I spent my free time playing with the younger children, a six-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy. Aside from my Peace Corps language tutor, the two of them were my greatest language teachers.

For language and cultural sessions, I was in a group of four with a language tutor who had been with Peace Corps for seven years. We were issued a national *Tongan Language Dictionary*, a *Tongan Language Workbook* and a *Tongan Language*

*Handbook*. Our tutor's approach focused on vocabulary building and structure of language, which we tracked in our "language notebooks" (a method I had learned about in my HSU coursework), and she tended to use content-based and task-based instructional strategies, which I recognized from prior coursework, though she never named them as such, but which she and the other language tutors had been trained in by the Language Coordinator, using Peace Corps training materials.

My group members and I had already been introduced to Tongan language basics through a series of worksheets and recorded lessons that Peace Corps Tonga had sent to us a few months earlier. These lessons drilled us in the Tongan alphabet of 17 symbols (16 letters from the Latin alphabet and a glottal stop written as an apostrophe), pronunciation drills (Tongan letters have a one-to-one correspondence with their sounds), and beginning lexical phrases, such as *Mālō e lelei* ("Hello"), and *Fēfē hake?* ("How are you?").

After ensuring that we had indeed learned these basic concepts, our tutor spent some time stressing the importance of correct pronunciation in Tongan, which is affected by the *fakau'a*, or the glottal stop, and also by the *toloi*, a line over a vowel which indicates a drawn-out sound. We had discussed error correction in several of my courses at HSU, specifically error correction in learner's speech; in *Teaching by Principles*, for example, Douglas Brown stated that "[g]lobal errors need to be treated in some way since the message may otherwise remain garbled" (347). As Tongan is a phonetic language, pronunciation is very straightforward, and my language group members and I did well enough in sounding out words phonetically. As we learned new words, however, we

sometimes stumbled with glottal stops at the start of or in the middle of a word; this was a very important error for our tutor to correct as, without the glottal stop, we could be saying a completely different word (or a non-word), and this equated to a global error in our speech, or an error that affected understanding. For example, the word *uma* (“shoulder”) is very different from ‘*uma* (“to kiss”), yet the difference is only in the way one utters the first sound of the word (even now, I can only remember the difference by picturing my host mom roughly saying ‘*uma* to my little host brother every morning).

Our tutor’s lessons always had the goal of preparing us for real-life communication, and to this end we sometimes had field trips around the village or homework activities that required us to engage our host family members in conversations on specific topics we had learned about. One of our early lessons, for example, centered on family, and we learned how to name different family members, such as *fa’e* (“mother”) and *tamai* (“father”). In order to engage our host family members in conversation, our tutor taught us the phrase *Ko hai ho \_\_\_\_?* which translated to “Who is your \_\_\_\_?” She then visited our homes and prepared our host parents to answer with a sentence frame indicating the person’s name, like *Ko Siasiko eku tamai,*” (“Siaso is my father”). My host mother, however, liked to have fun with our language sessions, so when I asked her, for example, *Ko hai ho tamai?* she answered laughingly with an unfamiliar phrase, pointing at her father, which I understood by her tone to mean something like, “You know who my father is!” This fit in with what I had learned about Communicative Language Teaching in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s text: “being able to communicate

required more than linguistic competence; it required communicative competence (Hymes 1971) – knowing when and how to say what to whom” (115).

Our tutor was especially concerned with training us in what our English 435/635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language packet called “sociolinguistic competency” and “strategic competence.” Sociolinguistic competence was defined as: “the appropriate production and comprehension of utterance in context. Consider: roles, purposes, participants, settings, etc.” (6). Context was especially significant in Tongan language, as there are different versions of the language, such as one version for royalty and one for commoners. Beyond this, there are also different words or phrases used to address people of higher standing than oneself, such as elders or community leaders. One of our first language lessons was on appropriate greetings and farewells to be used with people of different age or standing. For example, we could use the informal greeting *Mālō e lelei* with our peers, but should use the more formal *Mālō etau lava* with our superiors.

Our language tutor often centered her lessons on a specific topic, such as the greetings lesson mentioned above. She would begin her lessons by introducing words and phrases, which we would copy down and translate, then practice pronouncing, and finally practice through role plays. The role play scripts were meant to provide practice in correct syntax, so we would learn to form sentences correctly using the sentence frames we had learned. Our tutor would also sheepishly warn us about certain words which have different meanings in different contexts, and here is where she would focus on strategic competence, defined in the English 435/635 course packet as: “verbal and non-verbal

skills to repair breakdowns in communication, or to enhance the effectiveness of a communication” (6). In learning about food and eating, the word *huhu*, for example, means “fork.” But without a defined context, the word *huhu* can also refer to a woman’s breasts. When asking for a fork, our tutor suggested that we point to one or mimic the action of eating with a fork, or if we were able, to form a full sentence which included the item’s purpose, such as “pass me a fork so I can eat this papaya.”

During this time, my professor from HSU, Dr. Suzanne Scott, sent me current information about vocabulary teaching to inform my insight into the methods and strategies my tutor employed (we communicated throughout my three years of service in this way). Specifically, she sent me a comprehensive summary, which she and several of her current students had put together, of Dee Gardner’s *Exploring Vocabulary: Language in Action* (2013). One of the “foundational tenets” of vocabulary teaching named in the summary was that “vocabulary instruction should focus on both forms and meanings” (Gardner 3); this coincided with DeCarrico’s approaches reviewed in English 435/635: Introduction to ESL/EFL. Our Tongan language tutor certainly focused more attention on the meanings of words in Tongan, as so many words had such different meanings which weren’t necessarily transferrable from one form of the word to another, or more precisely, from Tongan to English. To give an example: the word *kaukau* means “to shower.” However, when the prefix *faka-* (“in the way of”) is added, the word *fakakaukau* means “to think.” Moreover, unlike in English, where a word could form part of a word family with its inflected forms in different tenses (such as “walk,” “walked” and “walking”), tense in Tongan is indicated by a separate word added at the beginning



of a sentence, and the verb remains unchanged; a basic SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) English sentence then, would have a tense+SVO structure in Tongan. For example, the English sentences: “I walk to the market,” and “I walked to the market,” would be translated, respectively: *Oku ou lue ki he maketi* and *Na’a ku lue ki he maketi*.

While our tutor did teach us beginner Tongan lexical phrases, she avoided teaching most collocations or idioms at this early stage, as these were perceived to be too advanced for us to understand. In the summary of Gardner’s text, the authors presented his thoughts on collocates, noting that while older native speakers can understand the different meanings in collocates such as *break a bone* vs. *break a record*, younger native speakers and English language learners often do not (3). Gardner does, however, advocate for teachers to “[d]irectly teach prolific phrasal verbs” (12). Our tutor did introduce a few common phrasal verbs which we encountered immediately, such as *tangutu ki lalo* (“sit down”) and *tu’u ki olunga* (“stand up”), and *ha’u ki loto* (“come in”), and *’alu ki tu’a* (“go outside”), as well as Tongan words for some common English phrasal verbs, like *vave* (“hurry up”) and *laku* (“throw away”).

In other lessons, we learned about Tongan grammatical structures. Our tutor sometimes employed a descriptive approach (described in the last section of this chapter, Pre-Service Coursework), but more often used a prescriptive approach, explaining the correct structure for a certain type of sentence and then giving us examples. I found that I learned best by figuring out the structure through comparing several examples. However, our tutor was limited in using this technique by a lack of access to authentic texts; Peace Corps Tonga did not have a corpus or library of Tongan language texts to draw from for

language teaching, such as we have available for the English language. Our tutor also did not make much use of the language workbook and handbook beyond assigning pages for homework and checking that we had filled them out the next day. These contained chunks of text, such as paragraphs on family life and types of foods, that could have been actively incorporated into our language classes.

Not having any reading instruction in our language training was a missed opportunity. In our 635: Introduction to English as a Second or Foreign Language text by Douglas Brown, he asserted that: “For literate learners, the interrelationship of written and spoken language is an intrinsically motivating reflection of language and culture and society” (286). This would become obvious to me in later months, as I continued my language practice at my post in Vaini by translating the Tongan language leveled readers available in the primary school library, through which I learned not only language, but also cultural concepts of nature and animals, food, social activities, work and play, and much more.

Our most useful language lessons were the task-based lessons for which our tutor took us on short field trips. For our unit on shopping, for example, after several days of practice with words, phrases, and sentences through drills and role plays, our tutor drove us to a nearby shop. This shop was a small building with metal bars along the front, through which the shopper would ask the shopkeeper for items from those displayed on shelves along the back wall. Our tutor had taken our “language ego” into account, and had arranged the lesson previously with the shopkeeper, who would bear with us patiently and offer hints if we stumbled in forming intelligible sentences. Despite our

heightened stress in this “real-life” interaction, all of my group members got through the activity successfully.

Every one of our lessons were meant to prepare us for real-life interactions like this one, and our tutor also insisted that some of the activities could be adapted to our teaching of English at our future posts. However, many of these activities involved discussions, translations and descriptions in our L1 (first language), English. Many of the strategies she used were specific for adult learners with a thorough and explicit understanding of L1 grammar and structure, which allowed learners to compare, contrast and describe second-language usage; for this, our tutor employed contrastive analysis. I had studied contrastive analysis (and its successor, contrastive rhetoric) in some of my coursework at HSU; in Ferris and Hedgcock’s *Teaching L2 Composition*, they defined contrastive analysis as comparing “the grammatical structures and phonological properties of learners’ primary languages with those of the target languages that they were acquiring” (19). The purpose of this method, was so teachers could “identify specific areas of difficulty (e.g., syntax, morphology, and speech production)” (19). However, as these meta-discussions were conducted in our L1, we couldn’t adapt these activities to our teaching unless we reached a highly advanced level of Tongan language ability.

A few of the field trips I went on with my language group were specifically aimed at acclimating us to our new context. We had a scavenger hunt in Nuku’alofa, the capital, where we were given a list of places and things to find and take pictures of; instructed to interview someone in Tongan; and told to make a list of names for things at the shops

that we hadn't already learned. We visited a sports complex to learn about perceptions of sports in Tonga and of women athletes. We also visited an agricultural company, Nishi Trading, where we learned about methods for planting and growing certain fruits and vegetables in Tongan soil. The longest field trip was the host volunteer visit, where each of us moved in with a current volunteer for a few days and got to see them in action.

In the last week of October, my trainee group had our graduation ceremony. Our host parents, Peace Corps staff, and principals and staff members from the schools that would be hosting us gathered at a seaside venue for speeches, dancing, singing, and food. I was honored, along with a fellow volunteer, to present a thank you speech in the Tongan language to our beloved family members who had taken us in for two months and loved us as their own children. I was also blessed to sing a beautiful Tongan song, *Katinia* (Gardenia), with my host dad and two host cousins with an ukulele, guitar, and violin, for the audience. My group members and I performed several Tongan dances, decked in handmade fiber mats tied with fiber ropes at the waist and dripping from neck to toes with coconut oil. Finally, we were sworn in as official Peace Corps Tonga Volunteers, committed to serving Tonga to the best of our abilities for the next two years of our lives.

During my year of coursework before entering Peace Corps service, I had prepared to train teachers in skills and strategies for teaching EFL. I also had the opportunity to broaden my knowledge about the history, culture and people of Tonga, and to gain experience towards positive inter-cultural interactions. During my in-country training in Tonga, I gained insight about my new context, especially through sessions and

field trips with current volunteers and time spent with my Tongan friends and family. I learned that the main objective for Peace Corps volunteers in the *Tonga English Literacy Project* was to provide support and training in student-centered teaching methods, and to support the development of literacy programs in our schools and communities. As I prepared to move to my new home in the village of Vaini on the island of Tongatapu, I felt enthusiastic about what awaited.

## PRIMARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL SERVICE

A week after our graduation from trainees to volunteers, all of my group members were moved to our sites. I moved to a small house on the grounds of a primary and middle school in the village of Vaini. I begin this chapter with perceptions of my community and school formed in my first two months at site. These perceptions include insights about education in Tonga, gathered from my counterparts and friends during this time. The following section of this chapter gives a chronological account of the literacy development projects I took part in during my two years at the school. My main goal with these projects was always to ensure sustainability, and over time I learned that both my challenges and successes were determined by the care I invested in inter-personal relationships with the people involved.

### The Community and the School

Tonga bears the nickname of the “Friendly Islands” because of the warm and amiable people who live there. In Vaini I was lovingly received by several families who made sure I was welcome and well-fed. My new neighbors found plenty of time for socializing as they went about their business. There were always kids singing, running, yelling, and teasing each other, and animals ambling around – pigs, chickens, goats and dogs (including my four adopted dogs: Fiemohea, Taika, Tandog and Mimi). Many women worked at home while men worked in the bush (agricultural land), and some

people commuted 30 minutes to the capital city of Nuku'alofa each day, to work in banks, restaurants and other industries. In the evenings my Tongan friends often invited me to watch the men's rugby practice and to join the women's netball games at the nearby field, or to cruise by the basketball and volleyball games at the Mormon chapel courts or in people's backyards. The soundtracks at dusk were the church choir practices, and, later in the night, guitars, ukuleles, and rich voices drifting from the halls where men gathered to gossip and drink kava.

Vaini was one of the largest villages in the country, stretching from the center of the island of Tongatapu straight down to the southern shore, where the cliffs of Hufangalupe overlooked the ocean. The island's main road crossed the northern part of the village, and most of the village's population of around 3,000 people lived in a few blocks around this road, while the area to the south was used for agricultural crops. The northern part of Vaini village sloped upwards, and the Vaini Government Primary School (GPS) and Government Middle School (GMS) compound was built at the top of the hill.

After the Nuku'alofa Government Primary School, Vaini GPS was the largest public primary school on the island. We had over 330 students, and if the middle school students were also counted (the middle school buildings were inside the same compound), the school population reached over 450 students. Though the middle school and the high school were separate in name, the GPS and GMS staff, the Vaini community and even the Ministry of Education (MoE), treated them as one entity. At the school there were 20 staff members, thirteen primary school teachers and six middle school teachers, plus the school principal.

There were just a few weeks left before the end of the academic year when I arrived in Vaini in early November. I had the luxury of being a novelty to the staff and to the few students who were still in attendance – many were already on summer trips or else stayed home to avoid the balmy heat – and I never lacked company or food. When my fellow teachers kept me company, as we ate bread slathered in ice cream or boiled cassava with fried chicken, I asked them questions about Tongan society, culture and education.

My new Tongan counterparts intimated that social hierarchy was very important in Tongan culture. While it was taboo to talk openly about your own position and your income, everyone clearly knew each other's positions and incomes, particularly in relation to their own. People in higher positions were to be treated with respect and deference. Although my counterparts were coy about it, I inferred that being a government school teacher was a prestigious and well-paid career, and educators had a high standing in society. Teachers, of course, deferred to principals, and principals deferred to MoE officials.

Aside from the Ministry of Education, there were several other stakeholders involved in Tongan education. There were private, non-government school systems, most of them belonging to religious organizations. The two largest non-government school systems were the Mormon system and the Free Wesleyan system; the Mormon system had only secondary schools while the Free Wesleyan system had primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. The Catholic Church, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and Bahai faith also had private schools.



Government primary schools such as ours included Class 1 to Class 6 (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and secondary schools had Form 1 to Form 7 (7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> grade), or else were separated into middle schools (Forms 1 and 2) and high schools (Forms 3 through 7). Student population size varied from village to village; some primary schools could have only ten students, while the largest could have over 400. In the smaller schools, grades were often combined (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders were taught together, and so on), especially if there were few teachers. In the largest schools, one teacher might be in charge of 30 students, and even 60 or more if other teachers were absent or on leave.

The school year began in February and ended in December, with a month-long break in June. School would be cancelled in the event of severe storms or cyclones, but often on rainy days as well, especially in smaller villages. There were several holidays throughout the school year, including religious holidays and national holidays like the King's birthday, and school would also be cancelled for important community events such as funerals. With so many missed school days, there was a never-ending cycle of catch-up work to be done on prior units at the beginning of each new quarter.

In early October, the most important event of the primary school year would take place. These were the Class 6 (6<sup>th</sup> grade) final exams, called the *sivi* or *sivi hu* ("entrance exam"), and the results of these exams would determine what secondary schools each Class 6 student could attend, which, in many ways, would determine their entire future; high scores would guarantee acceptance into the government high schools (of which most of the country's political and professional leaders were graduates), while the private schools would accept the lower-scoring students. Still, students also needed to reach

certain scores to be able to attend their church's private high school. In fact, our Vaini Government Middle School was somewhat of a continuation school for students from around the island who had not scored well enough on their Class 6 exams. Many of our local Class 6 students would move on to other schools thanks to their scores, though some would attend our GMS to stay close to home. The majority of our GMS students, however, were from other villages on the island.

At our primary school (and primary schools around the country), after the *sivi hu*, and especially after quarter 4 final exams in late October and early November for the rest of the grades, many students stopped attending school, or attended sporadically, which explained why our school looked emptier each day as the end of the school year approached.

In my first week or so at the school, I was able to look through some of the teachers' quarter 4 final exams, as I was tasked with making copies of all of them. This piqued my interest in the English curriculum; although we had learned *about* it during pre-service training, we had not had a chance to see it in action. My counterparts said they had been using the updated English curriculum for a few years. Veteran teachers who had taught with the old curriculum, which introduced English at Class 1, seemed unhappy with the shift to starting English at Class 3. They seemed to think that it put too much pressure on the Class 4, Class 5 and Class 6 teachers. Class 4 teachers were supposed to progress from barely introducing English reading and writing to their students at the beginning of the year, to having their students analyzing and writing short stories, reports and poems by the end of the year. The reality was that many of the

students could not keep up, and the Class 5 teachers were burdened with trying to bring these students up to the demands of the Class 5 curriculum, which was a more advanced version of the Class 4 curriculum (Unit titles were the same, though unit content was different). Class 6 teachers would have the most critical task; they faced immense pressure to prepare students to achieve high scores on the all-important *sivi hu*. While in Classes 4 and 5, teachers could resort to drills and repetition for students to memorize content for each unit and pass their exams, Class 6 teachers needed to somehow shift students towards genuine comprehension, if not to get them into the government high school, to at least ensure that they could keep up with the all-English curriculum starting in Form 1 (7<sup>th</sup> grade).

Stakeholders in Tongan education were apparently not unaware of these issues in the new English curriculum, as well as the pressures teachers were facing, especially with the Class 6 exams. Leaders in education were also not unaware of the importance of reading in language development. There seemed to be an answer to the English curriculum problems in implementing some sort of literacy development program. Yet, at that point, the Ministry of Education could only carry out initial measures. Principals were strongly encouraged by the Ministry to ensure that teachers incorporated reading time into their daily English and Tongan lessons. Each teacher would now be required to have a classroom library, which needed to include books in both Tongan and English. Moreover, the MoE also insisted that each school create a central library as well. Vaini GPS had certainly not escaped this top-down pressure, and this was the main reason that Vaini's former Peace Corps volunteers had founded the library in 2014 (the same library

my trainee group had visited on one of our field trip technical training sessions). On my first day at the school, the principal had given me the keys to this library, insisting that it would now be *my* library. As I learned more about the MoE's objectives, I began to perceive that I had inherited not just a physical space, but also a symbolic one.

The library at Vaini GPS was a long rectangular room adjacent to the main office. Before that it had been a storage room, but the previous PCVs, with help from students, had cleared it, cleaned it, painted and installed plastic floor covering, and established the beginnings of a school library (see Appendix B). There were four long benches in the middle of the room and four thin bookshelves against the two long walls. On one short wall there were two old wooden blackboards, and along the other short wall there were boxes of dusty art materials and broken desktop computers stored under a termite-eaten table. The bookshelves held collections of donated used books from overseas, neatly organized into sections; a section of picture books sorted by author last name; a section of resource books divided using a (simplified Dewey Decimal) color system; a section of young adult short stories and novels; a small section of Tongan language paperbacks created and printed by the Ministry of Education; a section of teacher resource books including copies of the Peace Corps *Idea Book* and *Assessment Book*, and bulk copies of the Tongan language paperbacks; and a section of paperback English Sight Words Books (SWBs) created by Peace Corps volunteers and partners at Tonga's Tupou Tertiary Institute. As the windows around the entire room were not sealed, everything was coated with dust.

The library had been up and running for about a year when I arrived. The previous PCVs had recruited responsible students as junior librarians to help with weekly clean-up, and they had also recruited a few teachers from both the primary and middle schools, as well as the principal, for a library committee. The PCVs intended to transfer full responsibility of the library to these committee members once the two of them finished their service, so the new PCV could focus solely on co-teaching. The teachers, however, seemed to have different ideas for me as that new PCV.

In my first month at site, I was able to draw out some of the teachers' expectations of me as their PCV. A few of the primary school teachers explained that, with the previous PCVs, teachers would often plan the material for a lesson and pass this to the PCV, who would then modify the lesson to include student-centered methods, and the PCV would teach the lesson in the teacher's classroom, often while the teacher took care of errands (like making copies and planning other lessons). They reported that the PCVs used small groups, songs, games and guided reading as well as free reading in their lessons with the primary students. The PCVs had also held afterschool classes from 3-5 p.m. in the library, where they taught English through mini-lessons, songs and games, and helped the older students with their English homework. The middle school teachers explained that they resorted to the PCVs when they needed help with a lesson in which they felt they had gaps or weaknesses, such as an English grammar lesson. I was also able to speak with the previous PCVs, who explained that their intent had been to co-teach each lesson with the teachers' help, but teachers would often leave the classroom once the PCV arrived. Although the school year ended on the first week of December, I still

spent much of my summer break (December to January) hanging out in the library; many of my new friends in Vaini had gone traveling, so I didn't have much company except on Sundays, when I went to church with my counterpart and her family.

In early January, Peace Corps brought me and my fellow volunteers together for the second half of our Pre-Service Training. We were moved to the capital for two weeks, where we taught summer school English classes to students from schools all over the island. Although this shorter training period provided an opportunity for us to practice teaching, and co-teaching, Tongan students, we were paired with each other (Peace Corps volunteers), and not Tongan teachers. Though the purpose of the training, according to Peace Corps Tonga, was to allow us to practice team-teaching techniques, I felt that it did nothing to prepare me for team-teaching with a Tongan counterpart, especially in light of the expectations that my counterparts at Vaini had expressed weeks before.

As the Peace Corps training wound down and I prepared to rejoin my Vaini counterparts at the start of the new school year in February, I had time to reflect on these expectations. Many of the teachers had expressed their expectation that I would also teach their English class periods, as the former PCVs had done, as well as take care of the library, which they called "my library" or the "*pisikoa* (Peace Corps) library." What my counterparts expected of me both frustrated and confused me, and as their English Literacy *Facilitator* I felt it was not my place to teach *for* them. In my mind, I had formed a clear framework of what sustainable literacy development would look like, and I intended to stand by my principles. In the library, I believed this would mean partnering with teachers to lead guided reading sessions, to foster enjoyable sustained silent reading

time, and to teach mini-lessons on literacy skills and other topics. In the classrooms, I thought that teachers and I would co-plan and then co-teach effective and engaging lessons with an emphasis on student participation, and over time teachers would become adept at creating student-centered lessons. My training and experiences had prepared me to do *sustainable* work – work that would establish progressive practices and permanently enrich ways of thinking – and I felt that just teaching standalone classes would be a disservice to my Tongan counterparts. I was convinced that if my role as facilitator and resource person were clarified and well-defined, teachers would then reach out to discuss strengths and weaknesses in English teaching.

At this school, I assumed that my position as a trained and knowledgeable educator in English literacy teaching strategies would be recognized. I was ignorant that, as a *stranger*, I had done nothing to establish any position or to gain anyone's trust, and that I had no actual notion of the teachers' knowledge and skills. These differences in our assumptions and expectations would lead to challenges early in my service.

#### Literacy Development Projects: Library Upgrades, Co-teaching, and Teaching Resources

After the December-January summer break, we began the new school year in February with a new principal and a few new teachers. A teacher who had been a member of the Library Committee, as well as a mentor for me, was transferred to another school, two other teachers had left the country, and the veteran principal had retired, and all of these staff members had been replaced in the interim. Under pressure from the

MoE, the new principal's priority for her first year at Vaini GPS was to renovate the school grounds and administrative systems. She had worked with two previous Peace Corps volunteers as the principal of a GPS in another village, so I looked forward to her support for my role as English Literacy Facilitator and even held out hope that she would recruit me for teacher training. However, the physical renovations took immediate precedence over any other type of development, and I was swept up, as were all the staff members and students, in helping where we could or staying out of the way.

The new principal jumpstarted the process of upgrading and professionalizing the school with a grant from the Ministry of Education, and the community followed in kind. Community stakeholders like the town officer, the PTA leaders, the men's kava clubs, and the church groups invested their time and money into the renovations, reflecting their investment in their children's educations and futures. What had seemed a beat-up, dusty campus with few students in November transformed into a bustling center with school staff and community volunteers moving things, cleaning things, organizing, tearing down and rebuilding, all while teachers gathered their class groups and attempted to start teaching the first units of the curriculum.

February saw the renovation of several of our school buildings. During this time, teachers crowded into the remaining spaces, including the library. Without the use of my "classroom," I occupied my time observing and interacting with teachers and parents, as well as running errands for them and the principal. Teachers asked me for lesson-planning help, books and flash cards from the library, and worksheets and activities, which I would find online.



Although it wasn't teacher training or even teaching, I felt lucky to be doing anything at all, as some of my fellow G80 Peace Corps volunteers complained that day after day they were encouraged to "Just relax," or even "Stay home," while their counterparts slowly and steadily arranged their classrooms and students and got into routines. I was also blessed to have a lovely neighbor who made sure to take me to social events with her family, and some of my counterparts who lived nearby also took turns taking me to their churches; with the importance placed on religious (Christian) life in Tongan culture, my presence at church each Sunday must have gone a long way in the eyes of my new neighbors and students. The Class 2A teacher also agreed to be my Tongan language tutor, and she would come over to my house in the afternoons and tutor me while we ate snacks, then we would head over to the rugby field and join our neighbors in the women's netball practice.

In March, volunteers from the local kava club renovated the library, repainting the blackboards, repairing the roof and walls, installing a new door, and sealing the open windows around the top of the room with woodchip boards. Several community members, including our PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) Chair's children, also spent their Easter break helping me paint the library bookshelves in bright pastel colors (see Appendix C).

As the renovations neared completion, I worried about my volunteer work in the upcoming months. Would the principal support me in my role as English Literacy Facilitator, particularly with the objectives I had in mind? When several boxes of new books and art resources were found stashed in a forgotten corner of the main office, the

principal recruited me to add these items to our library collection. Noting my excitement at this project, and perhaps seeing a solution to the question of what to do with me as well as the question of how to meet the MoE's new literacy-focused mandates, she decided to task me with the full-fledged development of a central library for the school. The principal recognized sincere enthusiasm in my zealous urging that teachers schedule library time in their weekly planning, and also in my insistence that any supporting materials the teachers might need for their lessons could be found in the library.

Since my arrival in November and especially over the December-January summer break, I had pored over the library's contents, meticulously wiping off dust and gluing, taping, painting and refurbishing each item. During that time, I unconsciously built up my own ideas of the true *value* of each book, art tool, shelf, table and chair. Perhaps intuiting this, my counterparts distinctly called the library and library materials "mine," although they referred to other spaces in generic terms.

Ironically (unaware of my possessive behavior), I assumed that because they referred to it as mine, they did not feel a sense of *ownership* for the library space. I had been trained by Peace Corps to believe that, in order for development to be sustainable, locals needed to *take ownership* of the project. As the renovations were completed, I made a conscious and purposeful decision to conceive of the library as "theirs" and refer to it as such in conversations with counterparts and students from then on. Yet the concept of taking ownership for their library probably sounded as meaningless to my counterparts as the idea of the library actually being mine. I hadn't yet come to understand that in Tongan culture, things were for sharing and spaces were for

communing. Somehow, I had been deaf to these unspoken conventions. Moreover, in my own reasoning I was overlooking the fact that the community had just renovated the entire library. Those renovations weren't for *me*, they were for *everyone*, just as the library space and all its contents had been and would always be for everyone.

In these first few months of the school year, many of the teachers had made a habit of coming to me to ask for useful materials for their lessons, and I had come to feel accepted not only as their peer, but also as their English literacy resource specialist. I began to imagine that, if I could convince my counterparts of the library's usefulness, they would make an effort to familiarize themselves with its materials and so acquire a sense of responsibility for the care and maintenance of those materials. Therefore, I had tried to ensure that the teachers would benefit weekly from the library books and materials. I had helped the Class 4, 5, and 6 teachers photocopy and laminate English flash cards sets for their classrooms, and helped them print and use the materials on *The Flash* (USB drive). I had found and photocopied passages from books for the middle school English teachers to use for reading comprehension activities in their classes. I had taken on the role of librarian when teachers found time to bring their students by for a library visit. I had even met with the Form 1 English teacher several times a week to train him in guided reading instruction, including implementing student reading journals, so he could lead his students through a short story version of "Aladdin" (set in China), which we had discovered in a book. Several of my counterparts, including this Form 1 teacher, were also becoming my friends, as our conversations on teaching would turn to more personal topics.

As June loomed closer, teachers focused on preparing students for their mid-year exams. While, in the past few months, my counterparts had sought out books and passages for supplementary reading for their lessons, these were not perceived as useful for test prep, as the exams followed the material in the curriculum very exactly. Class library visits waned along with my use as a resource specialist, and I felt lonely as teachers stayed in their classrooms, drilling students solely on the curriculum content in their workbooks.

Around the same time, the school received a donation of 14 boxes of English books from the World Bank. I was instructed by the principal that all of the books from this donation were to be added to the library. To house our new books, the principal hired a local furniture-making business to measure the library walls for new shelving. Once we received our new bookshelves, I spent a few weeks allocating books onto the bookshelves and re-organizing the library to accommodate them (see Appendix D). This whole process created a bit of tension, as the primary school teachers felt that some of these books and shelves should go to their own classroom libraries, which they were otherwise expected to provide for out-of-pocket. As the librarian, I was uncomfortably placed in the middle of this tension between staff and administrators. Yet I had my own agenda, too; with the urgency of *my* development project firmly in mind, I hoarded the vast majority of these new books for the library. I was left to clean and organize the library and sort the shipment of books mostly on my own; only one teacher seemed to have time to help here and there, and none had time for the important task of learning the sorting system, which I knew was vital for the library project to be sustainable. I did not perceive, however, that

my “choice” to not share the new resources with the rest of the teachers was a main reason for the curious waning of their visits to the library. Once again, by following the stated protocols, I had broken the unstated ones.

Intermittently, at our weekly staff meetings, the principal allowed me time to describe the library upgrades and systems. For example, I was able to describe the updated book borrowing system (we now had hundreds more books than before, particularly books that were new, expensive and unique). At the end of each of these presentations, I asked for input from staff. They always seemed supportive of all of the projects I mentioned, or at least, they gave no objections. However, as I had been trained in the importance of constructive feedback, the lack of input was frustrating. Sometimes, I assumed that they simply did not care about what I did in the library, that they had not taken ownership and didn’t intend to do so. In retrospect, perhaps my wary protection of library materials and my long hours alone in the library were not making it easy for my peers to perceive the library as a shared space in the same way they did the other rooms, where they could come and go as they pleased, borrow anything indefinitely, and add to or take from the space at any time.

With the library ready to re-open in July at the start of the third quarter, I informed the principal that the library development project was now complete. With the library door open, my counterparts seemed to feel comfortable stopping by for social visits once again. Perhaps they had also forgiven me for my prior greed after I had passed out a few dozen books to each teacher for their classroom libraries (this hadn’t been an intentional act of penitence; rather, there had simply not been enough space on the new

shelves for all of the books). I felt like I was back in my peers' good graces and considered it was high time for me to be doing co-teaching and teacher training with them; instead, the principal requested that I now focus my work on establishing library procedures, rules, and schedules with all of the students and teachers. So, I did as I was asked.

The first week, I put together a schedule for each class to visit the library at least once a week for 30 or 40 minutes. The principal and I also created some guidelines for the library, which we passed out at our weekly staff meeting. Classes started attending the following week, and each group was introduced to the upgraded library for the first time. I wanted to establish a routine that could be managed by the teachers and students after I left, so I developed a lesson on library procedures to teach each class on their first visit. This first visit began with a review of the rules. The students formed two lines in front of the door, and recited the rules (see Appendix E) before being allowed into the library. The rest of the time in this initial visit was spent on a library tour for both the teachers and students to become familiar with the new organization of the library sections, as well as library procedures such as appropriate book handling, and guidelines for free reading time, arts and crafts time, and mini-lesson time.

In the first few weeks after this initial visit, most teachers requested that I choose library activities for their students. After a few more weeks some of them began to feel comfortable choosing their activities for library time, such as free reading time, guided reading, looking at books about a certain topic, playing games with flash cards, or even mini-lessons on certain topics (these will be discussed in the following pages). I found

that once the teachers felt comfortable in the library space, many preferred to either take charge of the activities, or to tell me their chosen activity and then observe as I led it.

Through the third and fourth quarters, there were several social events, like PTA meetings, MoE conferences, school feasts, and holidays, when I had a chance to just hang out with my counterparts and join in on gossip, eating, laughing and comradery. On regular school days, the teachers also began to settle into regular patterns for library time. This allowed me to finally, near the end of my first year, truly get to know my counterparts' personalities, as well as their teaching styles, and strengths and weaknesses in teaching English.

During library time, I found that some teachers were already well-versed in literacy development methods, such as guided reading. For example, the Class 3A teacher loved to do story-time with her students; she would read English picture books to them and they would also do guided reading with the Tongan leveled readers. This teacher used several of the curricular principles for reading instruction that I had learned about in Grabe and Stoller's *Teaching and Researching Reading*. For example, she "provide[d] some degree of student choice" (132) by pre-selecting three or four titles related to her current curriculum content and letting the students choose which one they would read together; she "structure[d] lessons around pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading tasks" (132) such as analyzing the title and cover art, pausing for discussion along the way, and asking comprehension questions after the reading; and she "provide[d] opportunities for students to experience comprehension success" (132) by including some very simple questions that all of the students would be able to answer, or else giving hints

so students could answer more complicated questions, and she often tied the reading back to things the students had learned earlier in class.

Other teachers could intuitively pick up on the guided reading methods after just one or two demonstrations. On her first visit, the class 2A teacher asked me to lead an English story-time reading with her class. She sat back and observed me reading a very simple story with big pictures to her students. I asked her for help with short translations at intervals, and she gained confidence as the reading continued, eventually moving her chair to sit next to me and point to things while translating; she seemed drawn in by the usefulness of the moral lesson in the story for her young students, and when we finished the book she took some time to review and emphasize this lesson with them in Tongan. She then confidently led the students in reading two other picture books on related topics of being polite. After her reading, she asked me if I had any other suggestions for activities, so I led the students in a little game where they used the terms they had learned that day: “help,” “please,” and “thank you.” The teacher was delighted with the reading and the game on her first visit, and continued to visit the library weekly and do story-time with her students.

Both of the teachers in the reading lessons described above, as well as all of my counterparts that I observed leading guided reading in the library, employed Tongan to translate words and explain ideas throughout the lessons. In English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing, we had read two studies from Grabe and Stoller’s *Teaching and Researching Reading* on using translation in reading instruction. One study, on “the use of the L1 in L2 comprehension and mental translation as a reading comprehension



strategy” (110), found that “new vocabulary learning from reading is best supported by activities that engage students in translating and analyzing key words” (110); in their during-reading activities of pausing to ask questions and check comprehension of key words, this is exactly what my counterparts were doing.

The other study, on “pre-teaching vocabulary and its effects on reading comprehension” (108), found that “word list translation learning is an effective way to learn vocabulary, and, more specifically, it was effective as a pre-reading activity” (109). Some of my counterparts, when leading guided reading with leveled texts, would employ this strategy by going through and translating key words – usually listed together somewhere in the book – in the pre-reading phase of the lesson, and reviewing the vocabulary during and after reading.

Co-teaching instances also began to emerge spontaneously. Both Class 4 teachers favored directed reading; they would ask me beforehand to pull out books on a certain topic they were teaching at the moment (particularly science topics, taught in Tongan) so students could look at pictures and graphics about that topic. Together, we would read relevant bits in English and translate for the students, to deepen their understanding. Although we didn’t label it as such, this was a form of co-teaching. Both Class 4 teachers also expressed a desire to start co-planning lessons, but at first we were having trouble finding time.

By August I decided to be proactive and visited the Class 4A teacher in her classroom to ask what she would like to co-teach on. She explained that they were learning about the water cycle in science class that day and would like to have them work

on that in the library. I took her up on the offer and when she came to the library later that day, we quickly reviewed and edited the short content-based lesson I had thrown together, which included her as co-teacher. She seemed nervous and offered to observe until she felt comfortable; we compromised in that she would assist by translating and ensuring understanding. I pulled out twelve science books which included graphics of the water cycle. After the students settled in, I began the lesson by gauging prior knowledge with the teacher's help, in a mix of English and Tongan. With the students providing the information, we drew the water cycle on the chalkboard and labeled its parts in English, translating the terms they knew from Tongan. I then asked them questions about how the water cycle worked, particularly on their island; they had learned the conventional model of water flowing down from mountains through rivers back to the sea, but there are neither mountains nor rivers on Tongatapu. Together, we talked about how the water cycle might work on the small islands of Tonga – where the rain comes from and where it goes, their teacher now excitedly participating as co-teacher. After this discussion, we put the students in pairs, and directed them to look through their books until they found a picture of the water cycle. The students were excited and treated it as a competition. Once the pair found the graphic, we asked each pair to translate the terms around the picture, and to explain as best they could what was happening in the cycle in English. Most groups showed improvement in talking about the cycle in English, and generally, by the end of the lesson. The teacher expressed her surprise and pleasure at discussing the water cycle and contextualizing it to Tonga, since she was always taught about the water cycle in theory, with the mountain-river-ocean model. Her students enjoyed looking through

the science books once they had had a discussion about the water cycle, and could recognize some of the terms and understand some of the information given in the books.

The day after the water cycle lesson with Class 4A, the Class 4B teacher asked me to do an impromptu class for her students in English. She liked the idea of cross-subject teaching, and asked me to review the metric system and its divisions in English with the kids. I organized the lesson in the same manner, beginning by gauging prior knowledge and translating relevant vocabulary words as well as drawing graphics for different measures (centimeter, meter, etc.). Unlike the 4A teacher, the 4B teacher preferred to either observe as I was teaching, or else teach on her own.

Both of these lessons, and other cross-subject lessons, addressed the principles of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) as described in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson's *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, which I had learned about in my English 435/635: Introduction to ESL/EFL course. In these lessons, "[b]oth the content and the language [were] targets for learning" (138); we made sure to "build on students' previous experience" (138); we provided "missing language when the students [had] trouble in explaining a concept" (138); we ensured that "learners perceive[d] the relevance of their language use" (138); and that they "worke[d] with meaningful, cognitively demanding language and content within the context of authentic material and tasks" (138). The lessons' success in teaching language and content, as well as the students' *and* the teachers' enjoyment of the lessons led to requests for more content-based lessons.

The Class 4A teacher and I continued to co-plan and co-teach lessons, which the 4B teacher would then also teach to her class. In October, we put together a few lessons for a unit on poetry which were particularly successful. When the Class 4B teacher saw how insignificant my role had been in the actual teaching portion, she was enthusiastic, and brought her students in for the same lessons. One of the reasons the teachers were so excited was because we were able to use several of our flash card sets and children's dictionaries in different ways (finding pairs of rhyming words, coming up with rhyming words for words picked at random, identifying the rhyming pattern in groups of words, using the words to create poems, and more), activities which both teachers were previously unfamiliar with, as they had never used flash cards or dictionaries in that manner.

I was excited to see the teachers becoming familiar with the library materials and learning innovative ways to confidently use these in different lessons. When teachers would return looking for a specific book or resource to use again, or else a different teacher came looking for that same resource on the suggestion of the first teacher, I felt gratified that my peers were recognizing the true value of the library and its contents. I interpreted this shift as teachers finally beginning to take ownership. In reality, *I* was unconsciously adapting to the Tongan culture of sharing, and as I relaxed my own control over the library, my counterparts began to feel they were truly welcome in it.

Finally, there were a few teachers who sought me out for teacher training, as the Form 1 English teacher had done early in the school year. The Class 3B teacher, for example, always brought his students in for free reading time, allowing them to pick any

books and read or look through them on their own, so he could consult with me about a certain English topic he was teaching (while this wasn't overt literacy training, this free reading time was also supported by research; in *Teaching by Principles*, Brown noted of extensive reading: "reading for pleasure and reading without looking up all the unknown words were both highly correlated with overall language proficiency" (360)). During this time, the Class 3B teacher would often ask for materials and reference books where he could gain information, make photocopies of charts and images, and so on.

Over the year, the Class 4A teacher had become a trusted friend, and she was always the most enthusiastic about co-teaching with me and reaching out to me for resources, not just for English teaching but for her science and arts lessons as well. She was also the most recent graduate of the teacher's college, which had in the last few years adapted their teacher training towards student-centered methods and collaborative teaching as well as cross-curricular teaching.

I had grown to admire the Class 5B teacher, who had also become a trusted friend. She lived within walking distance, and I would sometimes stop by her house, or find her at the rugby field (when I went for ladies' netball practice) so we could chat and catch up on the latest gossip. She had been teaching for over 15 years, had 6 children, spoke excellent English, and was witty and intuitive, and I often sought her advice on how to handle situations in a culturally appropriate way.

Even with all these positive relationships I was forming with my counterparts, I found there were still some issues I needed to work through. For example, although we had established guidelines for library time at our staff meeting, including that students

could not attend without their teachers, I found that some teachers initially sent their students without coming themselves. In my eyes it felt like a test of boundaries, and it also felt like resistance, especially as I had come to understand that disagreements in Tongan culture were often handled with passive-aggressiveness; perhaps some of the teachers believed library time should be a break from their students and a free period for their planning, but they would not tell me if they thought I would disagree.

The Class 5A teacher did not bring his students to library time for the first month or so, and his students pleaded with me and complained bitterly. In order to respect his position (he was an older male teacher), all I could do was remind him of library time in private so as not to undermine or insult him, and leave it up to him. The other Class 5 group attended every week and we often played games together. The Class 5B teacher was an excellent English teacher and her students were ahead in the curriculum, as well as in their English abilities, so they were able to have free reading time and language game time every week (incidentally, the free reading time, which they got both in the library and in their classroom with the Class 5B teacher's extensive classroom library, was likely a main reason for their being ahead). Late in the third quarter, the Class 5A teacher finally brought his class to the library, and though he seemed grumpy and aloof when he first arrived, he spent the last 20 minutes helping me to explain to the students how the borrowing system worked and the kinds of materials that were available for their (and his) use in the library.

He expressed his gratitude for the visit at the end, and excitement to continue to attend library time, which he did from then on. The two Class 5 groups continued to

attend regularly for the rest of the year, though the teachers were not interested in co-teaching. However, in October, when they heard about the Class 4 poetry activities, they both asked if I would teach these lessons to their students, who were also learning about poetry at the time. I agreed, under the condition that they would be present and provide translations as well as support during the lesson. They both did and though we did not label it as such, I was glad to be able to co-teach with them.

Although they had explicitly asked to be included in the schedule, the Class 6 groups also did not make it to the library. The final Class 6 exam would take place in early October, and as early as August they had started their cram sessions in the early mornings, which continued to the end of each school day. I was asked to provide afternoon classes, and many of the Class 6 students attended these as well. This meant that the majority of the Class 6 students were at school from around 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. three days a week and to 5 pm the other two days.

The Form 1 and 2 students were the only groups allowed to attend library time without their teachers. As the middle school was on a different schedule (a 6-day system which changed each week), the teachers chose to re-arrange each Wednesday and Thursday afternoon so the students could attend library time. However, as each teacher taught several subjects, they were not free to come with their students. This worked out in my favor, however, as it allowed me a chance to get to know the middle schoolers and build relationships with them. They often liked to joke and gossip, but they also asked interesting questions and listened to my advice. The middle schoolers would arrive in groups of 20 and after reviewing the library rules and procedures as well as book

handling and the borrowing system on their first visit, I left them to their own devices for the 30 or 40 minutes they spent in the library. The last ten minutes of every visit by every group were spent on clean-up and check-outs, and many of the students would come back after school and just hang out, under the pretense of helping me clean-up some more.

The twice weekly afternoon classes I was asked to teach were meant to be extra English support for any students who attended. Because of the high attendance in the first week (about 50 students tried to squeeze into the library), I had to have each grade level scheduled only every two weeks, instead of every week, so, on a given Tuesday I would have Class 3 students, Thursday I would have Class 4, and the next week I would have Class 5 and then Class 6. During this time, I would also teach lessons using Content-Based Instruction, as described earlier in this chapter, as this approach seemed to be popular with the students, and also provided a chance for them to become familiarized with different books in our vast non-fiction (Reference) section. On Mondays and Wednesdays I also began to coach basketball classes. This gave me another opportunity to get to know my upper-primary grade students, as well as to work with a few neighbors around my age who volunteered to help me coach the stampede of 60 plus students who showed up to the basketball courts at the Mormon Chapel each day. The afternoon English classes and basketball practices were the true highlights of my days.

During the third and fourth quarters of my first year at Vaini, I also continued my work as literacy resource specialist for the teachers. There were hundreds of printable leveled readers on the flash drive, and once the teachers had seen the sets I printed and laminated for the library, they requested copies for their own classrooms. I passed out



sets early in term 3, and at the end of the term I went around informally surveying teachers about the usefulness of the books. The first week of term 4, I passed out new book sets to each teacher, ten printed and laminated books for their classroom libraries (see Appendix F). A few of the teachers were particularly excited about these, requesting that I make as many as I could for their libraries. A few of the teachers also set up their own system to switch half of their books with those in the library sets, so they could read different stories with the kids at story-time. All of the teachers from Classes 3 through 5 said they wanted to continue the program the next year, though their usefulness from teacher to teacher varied. However, all of them expressed satisfaction at having different books available in the classroom, and some were happy to use them for teaching as visuals, reading materials, and for more information on specific topics. I was ecstatic about the enthusiasm some of my counterparts were showing in using these materials, and it felt like validation for the work I was doing and motivation to continue pushing these types of resources and resource development projects, which I saw as building tethers from the library space to the rest of the school.

As the end of the school year neared, I did perceive that it was not just the library space the teachers were connected to, but also me; as we spent time together in the library, we had gotten to know each other's personalities as well as our teaching methods and approaches, and built genuine trust. I finally began to understand that teachers' attitudes about co-teaching were quite fixed and in fact established before I had ever arrived; they were either comfortable with co-teaching, or they were not, and those attitudes would not necessarily change. It was not a question of convincing them all to

co-teach with me or winning them over in any sense, it was rather a question of who would be willing to do so according to their established beliefs. For those who were not, I had to figure out if there was any way they felt I could be helpful as a literacy specialist, and accept those who felt they did not need any help from me.

There was one project I had learned about in this first year which I felt would present an opportunity to help every teacher and every student, not just those in Vaini, but also those around the whole country. During Peace Corps training sessions (both at pre-service training and in-service training in April, not mentioned elsewhere because it focused on grant-funded projects and not on literacy work), Dr. Ruth Toumu'a, from the University of the South Pacific's Tonga campus, had presented on her teams' book development projects at Waka Publications. The books she showed us were beautifully illustrated and printed in color on glossy paper. Some were non-fiction books designed in a culturally sensitive and contextually accurate manner, such as a Tongan alphabet book, with accompanying poster, that used the names of a local marine animal to represent each letter. Others were fiction stories written by celebrated local authors with artwork by talented local artists. Some of the books were written in English, and several of their newer titles were written in Tongan (see Appendix G).

I was immediately drawn not just to these wonderful books, but to Dr. Ruth's passion for the project, especially in her determination to create contextualized books that would be easily accessible to Tongan learners through low prices and local availability. After her presentation, we had a long conversation about "mirror books" versus "window books," and the absence of the second type in Tongan primary schools; there were more

than enough “window books,” which give students a view into foreign experiences, while there were woefully few “mirror books,” or books that reflect locals’ experiences, in this case, the Tongan students’ own lived experiences. Ruth and I agreed that, if reading instruction were to support the Ministry of Education’s mandates for culture-centered curriculum, the books themselves needed to be distinctly *Tongan*. I spoke with her about the possibility of volunteering at Waka Publications in a third-year extension to my service, and she was delighted. Although I encountered Waka books in the Vaini library, I would not see Dr. Ruth again until mid-way through my second year at Vaini.

My second year at Vaini GPS started off relaxed and slow-paced. I met with my friends and counterparts to put together a tentative schedule for their library time, as well as suggesting they do library time on their own this year, without the presence of a librarian (me), though most of them seemed uncomfortable with this last idea. The schedule was very tentative because the Ministry of Education had decided to move around a few of our teachers again, though we did not know who or when.

At the end of our first week we headed to town for a Ministry of Education meeting with teachers from all the schools on the island. At this meeting, a ministry official announced the names and locations for teachers who would be moved from their current schools to positions at different schools. We found out that our Class 5A teacher would be transferred to another school, but no one was assigned to replace him. Our Form 2 English teacher would also be moved without a replacement. Earlier in the week, one of the middle school teachers had also gone on sick leave, and it seemed that she would need to be gone for several months.

What had seemed to be the start of an easy year now looked stressful and hectic, as we were short-staffed and it was unclear when replacement teachers would be assigned. Although my counterparts continued to behave in their calm, easy manner, there were traces of anxiety and uncertainty. The instability of our staffing situation was affecting them all, as each of them faced several possibilities; they might suddenly be transferred to another school while their families remained at Vaini, or moved to another grade level or classroom when they had already planned for their current one, or be put in charge of 60 students for half the year until the Ministry decided to send around a new teacher.

Although for a few days I was somewhat overlooked, the principal soon sought me out with a special request: I was asked to teach Form 2 (8<sup>th</sup> grade) English until a new teacher arrived for the middle school. I felt prepared to teach the Form 2 students for as long as necessary, and to use this time to flood them with literacy-development activities. As noted earlier, a majority of our middle school students had scored low on their Class 6 exams, particularly on the English exam. I felt my time with them would be an opportunity to use my knowledge and boost their English skills, especially through reading instruction. It worked out quite well as I was able to teach the first unit, Reference, which was all about libraries. The students came to the library each day and learned about the Dewey Decimal sections, different types of texts, and the use of reference texts such as atlases, encyclopedias, and dictionaries, through hands-on activities I had devised. I taught the Form 2 English classes full-time for two weeks before the replacement teacher arrived.

In mid-February of my second year at Vaini, when two new teachers arrived unexpectedly, I was informed by the middle school head teacher that I wouldn't need to teach Form 2 anymore. I believe the head teacher, who was also my friend, thought she was relieving me of a burden; yet, the truth was that I had thoroughly enjoyed those two weeks of teaching. Without a job now, I tried to meet with the principal to establish my projects for the year, as library visits were indefinitely postponed until more replacement teachers arrived, but she seemed to always be busy. It became increasingly discouraging to sit alone in the library day after day, and I struggled with how to express what I was feeling in a culturally appropriate way; I knew that Tongans avoided confrontation, and they believed in patience and humility, so I did not want to seem angry, rash, or demanding.

One afternoon, the Form 2 students came seeking my help: they were utterly confused with the new teacher, who seemed unsure of how to teach English and apparently jumped from unit to unit, using lessons at random. I could accept my own dissatisfaction, but the students deserved better. I scheduled a meeting with the principal to make an appeal for the Form 2 students, and also meekly admitted to feeling useless without any clear expectations set for me. She was surprised to learn I had been without projects for a while, and promised to communicate more consistently with me. We also met with the middle school to inquire about the Form 2 English. The new teacher revealed that he was a science teacher, not an English teacher; the principal had assumed he was the English replacement and assigned him the class, and, out of deference, he had

not contradicted her. At this point we all began to find the whole situation fairly funny, as it had all been caused by adherence to cultural conventions.

This event transformed my relationships with many of the staff and the principal; I felt more warmth and appreciation from them than I ever had before. It seemed that I had finally chosen the right protocol – the unspoken one. The complications it caused did not matter, because choosing humility and patience over pride and selfishness was the right way, the *Tongan way*.

I also felt a newfound respect in the principal's decision about how to deal with the situation; she decided that I and the new teacher would be co-teaching the Form 2 English class. It did not seem that we would be getting another replacement, so this teacher would train with me and eventually take over as the permanent English teacher.

Over the next few weeks he and I met in the library after school each day to talk through the parts of the units and plan our lessons and roles. He enjoyed discussing and planning for the cognitive parts of each lesson, which were not explicitly described in the Pupil's Workbook (we did not have a Teacher's Manual), and I was delighted to once again feel like I had some purpose and use at the school. By our second month, we were co-teaching very successfully: I taught some of the teaching points while he supported me, and he taught others while I provided support. For example, for the unit titled "Exposition" (in this curriculum, "Exposition" means presenting an opinion and arguing for it with supporting reasons), in our first lesson, I introduced the main guidelines for writing expository text and wrote notes for students to copy down in English. The teacher explained each point in further detail in Tongan, to make sure the students understood.

During the writing activity, when students had to write opinion and reason sentences using the sentence frame we had reviewed, the teacher went around checking student work, and then led the sharing and discussion part of the lesson that followed.

For our “Exposition” unit lessons, the Form 2 English teacher and I had to rely on the Pupil’s Workbook to formulate our lessons and match their content; as in the primary school final exams, the middle school exam questions also largely tested students’ memorization of content. This unit was centered on a final task, writing an expository “essay” (a short paragraph, really, of three to four sentences). I had learned about designing appropriate writing tasks for my L2 learners in English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing, but was largely unable to apply these strategies, and even go against my better judgment, in teaching this unit. In *Teaching L2 Composition*, for example, Ferris and Hedgcock urge teachers to select sample texts that “reflect the target literacy or Discourse and that best match students’ literacy and linguistic needs” (121). We weren’t able to select our own sample texts, because structured sample “essays” (paragraphs) were provided in the Pupil’s Workbook, though the level of these texts was far above many of our students’ English abilities. We remedied this by scaffolding learning, first reviewing key vocabulary, then key ideas (“arguments,” “opinions,” and “reasons”), then guiding students through the reading and finally returning to key ideas.

Ferris and Hedgcock also provided “Assignment and Task Guidelines” (127), only some of which we were able to apply. In particular, we were able to allow students to choose their group’s writing topic, which was supported by Ferris and Hedgcock’s text: “students may be more interested in, and motivated by, a prompt that they have

selected from a short menu” (131). We were not, however, unable to avoid the “formulaic assignment” (131) that Ferris and Hedgcock warned against, as the Pupil’s book (and, eventually, the exam) called for a very specific, fill-in-the-blank sentence frame formula for the essay: “I believe that \_\_\_\_\_,” and “One reason is because \_\_\_\_\_,” and so on.

A second replacement teacher for the middle school arrived in April. Although we hadn’t been expecting another teacher, it was a relief to receive her, especially as her background was in high school English instruction. The middle school staff met up and re-assigned classes amongst themselves. The teacher with whom I had co-taught until March was moved over to science classes full time, and the new teacher took Form 2 English.

I couldn’t help feeling disappointed that my first successful and sustainable co-teaching partnership had come to an end, but I knew that the Form 2 students would benefit from an experienced teacher, and also that the principal would ensure I had something to do. I was asked to start a phonics program with the Class 3 students during their weekly library visits (they were not referring to the specific program known as “Hooked on Phonics” but rather to general phonetics development). I was also asked to begin (officially) co-teaching English class with one or both of the Class 4 teachers. Finally, the principal entreated me to continue the work of preparing the primary school teachers to take over library care and maintenance.

Class 3 students started their phonics program in late April. The teachers expressed their desire to build students’ English vocabulary in a way that was organized, structured, and accessible to the students, so I proposed that we implement a phonics



program beginning with word families and then blends, building from the students' familiarity with their native language phonemes, and the teachers seemed satisfied with this proposal. Here, finally, was a chance to put into practice some of the strategies and methods I had learned in prior coursework; as the article by Chien, Kao and Wei which I read for my project in English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing suggested, we created a program based on the students' phonological awareness in their first language. The students were drilled almost daily in Tongan words that contained similar sounds, such as *hele*, *pele*, *lele* and *Mele*, ("knife," "collard greens," "run," "Mary") or words that began with the same sound, like *ika*, *inu*, *ipu* and *ifi* ("fish," "drink," "cup," "smoke"). We reasoned that students would be able to transfer their understanding of Tongan words grouped by sound (rather than theme) to learning English words in word families.

For the rest of the second quarter, both Class 3 teachers brought their students for about 20 minutes each day and we led the students in learning six new words each week, starting with the word family "-at" ("cat," "rat," "bat," "hat," "mat," "fat"). The lessons involved introducing the sound of the vowel in "-at" (which was different from the sound of the Tongan vowel "a"), then blending it with the consonant, and then adding another consonant sound at the beginning, then blending that consonant with "-at." Then we would say the word a few times slowly, quickly, in funny voices, etc. We then translated the word to Tongan, and I would write both on the board. We did this for the set of six words, then we would move into other activities, such as listening to the word and writing it down in English or listening to the word and writing the Tongan translation. We would also play a few games, such as: using flyswatters to swat the word they heard

from the list on the board, or swat the picture of the word, or swat the English word from hearing the Tongan word, or swat the word from seeing the picture on a flashcard, and flashcard games such as matching the word to the picture in different ways. Near the end of each class, I discussed the lesson with the teacher and got her input, and I gave them a homework review worksheet.

In the third quarter, as the end of the year loomed closer, the class 3 teachers asked me to help prepare their students specifically for the shift to English Reading and Writing, as well as bilingual instruction, in Class 4, so I suggested a thematic vocabulary program for the last few months to flood the students with new words. The teachers decided to start off with vocabulary for objects around the classroom, as they knew students would begin to receive instruction in English, and it seemed important that they know their way around common learning tools (“pencil,” “ruler,” “globe,” “eraser,”) in English. I gave the teachers a set of flashcards each week with around ten nouns for objects around the classroom, and they taught and reviewed these, mostly through repetition, with their students. To apply what I knew about how to teach vocabulary, especially in terms of presenting vocabulary “within a communicative framework” (Brown 436), during library time I did games, writing competitions, and other activities to supplement the kids’ reading, writing and comprehension of the nouns.

From the second quarter on, the Class 4 teachers and I continued our impromptu co-teaching as we had done last year, mostly with cross-curricular learning, such as reviewing science topics through research in English science books. The same happened with the Class 5 teachers, but the Class 6 teachers only once in a great while made time to

bring their students to the library. Outside of school hours, though, my relationships with the teachers had grown stronger. My Class 4 friend and her husband would take me out sometimes to *eva pe* (wander around); one of the Class 6 teachers, who was also my neighbor, invited me to join a women's Zumba group during weeknights; and several of the teachers had taken me to church and brunch with their families.

In school, I taught supplementary lessons to the material that the Class 4 and 5 teachers covered in their regular English classes; although they weren't always interested in co-teaching, they now trusted me to accurately complement their lessons. One unit, for example, was "Information Report," which centered on reading and interpreting informative text, particularly about nature and the environment. With the Class 4 groups, I again did a series of content-based lessons on how different animals use their senses. We started off with two books about animals and their senses. The books included mini-activities to develop comprehension of how each sense functioned (such as guessing who someone was by touching their face with your eyes closed, or trying to guess what something was based on its smell). In the next lesson I showed students pictures of animals and they discussed, in small groups, where these animals lived and what they ate, as well as how they used their senses.

The Information Report unit in Class 5 focused mainly on marine animals, especially humpback whales (which visit Tonga every summer). We started off with a review lesson where the students formed small groups and looked through books about whales and sea animals. Each group had to do a scavenger hunt for different information in the book, and write it down. Every group had to have the right information written

down before the whole class could move on to the next question. These included things such as “What do whales eat, and where do they find this food?” There were also easy tasks such as “Find a picture of a sea turtle.” The kids enjoyed the short review lesson and it got them talking to each other about the topic using the English from the books.

In the next lesson, the students partnered up, and I passed out copies of a book that had easy-to-read information about environment, nature and animals in Tonga. The book was printed in bright colors with short chunks of text. Some of the text was in Tongan, and some in English. We had a short discussion about whales: who had seen one in real life, what they looked like and acted like, etc. We read through the three pages about whales, stopping after each paragraph so the kids could check comprehension with their partners and then as a whole class, and I explained some things further (such as whale migration) with the help of visual aids such as a globe, maps, and pictures from books. We finished this lesson with coloring; the kids colored a picture of a mother humpback whale and her baby swimming in the ocean.

Halfway through my second year, for the final stages of the library development project, I tried to implement several sub-projects to ensure the library’s sustainability. Some of these attempts were miserably unsuccessful. For example, just before the summer break, Vaini GPS had received a donation of 13 boxes of books. The principal again requested that I sort these and add them to the library. I countered that this was an opportunity to train the primary teachers in the sorting system, as part of preparing them to take over library duties. The principal agreed and said she would remind teachers as she went on classroom visits, yet no one ever came to help. It was disheartening. Soon

after this, our third quarter began with a 3-day visit from students and teachers from a high school in New Zealand. The visitors donated a new projector as well as bags of miscellaneous first-aid materials, and boxes of sports equipment, uniforms, books, wooden flash cards sets, phonics games, and art materials (colored pencils, paint brushes, acrylic paints, etc.). Once more, I was tasked with organizing everything, and it was all stored in the library under lock and key. Not surprisingly, no one volunteered to help me sort through these thousands of items.

As with prior donations, there was an underlying attitude that teachers should be entitled to have these materials for their classrooms, or even their homes. I was put in charge of making the decisions of who would receive what, an unwanted responsibility I tried to refuse but was pressured into, not just by the principal, but by my counterparts and even the community. They finally hinted that, because I would not benefit from the materials, I would divide them fairly. I did the best I could, creating identical sports equipment sets, first aid kits, and art materials kits for every classroom in the school, including ones for the library and main office, and everyone seemed satisfied.

It occurred to me that, possibly, no one had wanted to help with sorting prior donations because others might assume they would benefit in the process; if someone helped me sort, then they could pick out books they wanted and take them for their libraries. This unfair advantage might contrast with the Tongan principle of sharing, or else with notions of hierarchy which called for the highest person to receive the best gifts; as all the teachers were in the same social position, only the eldest should receive this honor, yet the eldest persons were also expected to be humble and modest. Regardless of

the reason, in my two years as librarian, I was not able to convince a single person to learn the library's sorting system.

To mitigate this failure, I decided to create laminated posters for each section of the library (see Appendix E). My counterparts immediately appreciated the fact that I had modeled these posters on the kinds of posters they made for their own classrooms; it seemed that handmaking and hand-laminating bright-colored posters was a rite of passage for Tongan teachers each year, and I had finally, belatedly, joined the club. These posters hung over every section of the library, describing, in simple terms, how to organize the section as well as what types of books belonged in it. I hoped that, when my counterparts were faced with having to sort through the next (inevitable) book donation, they could use these posters to maintain the established system. There were also laminated posters with simple instructions for cleaning and maintaining the library space, as well as a poster with a maintenance schedule per term which included every class group at the school. These posters also ensured that the students knew exactly how to organize the library, and that it would be thoroughly cleaned at least four times a year. By laminating them, I also hoped to make them water-resistant. In the event of heavy rains or even a cyclone, the posters could potentially survive and guide the school staff in rebuilding the library.

Other library development sub-projects were more successful. At a staff meeting early in the third semester, I had talked to my counterparts about "stagnation," where readers become tired of reading the same few books, and they affirmed that this was already happening with their limited classroom libraries. To prevent this, we began an

exchange program where teachers could borrow ten or twenty library books at a time, and swap these out for new ones at the end of each month. I saw this project as key to validating the library's long-term usefulness.

With this same objective in mind, I decided to assemble resource sets with information, activities and worksheets to be shared by teachers at each class level. I spent some time developing these sets, photocopying and laminating relevant materials and adding them to separate folders, one for each class level. I also sorted through a few dozen dusty school journals (short kids' magazines from overseas (mostly New Zealand) that included poems, short stories, information texts and plays and were printed in bright shiny colors), and cut out materials that could be used at different levels. This sub-project was just another effort to prove to everyone just how useful the library could be, if they would only do the research. At the next staff meeting, I distributed the laminated materials folders to my counterparts, who received the materials eagerly and appreciatively.

A few weeks after this, I surveyed the teachers for feedback on the usefulness of the folders, and while all of the teachers expressed their gratitude, they did point to two problems: 1) the two teachers at each level had to share the one folder of master copies, and 2) the master copies in these folders were not clearly marked for the English unit they could be used for.

Although I kept it to myself (as was correct in Tongan culture), I was immensely moved by the teachers' – my friends' – openness to giving me critical feedback on this project, as they had never been willing to do before. Their trust that I would not be

offended by this feedback, a possibility that should be avoided at all costs, proved that our relationships had grown strong enough that this was no longer a concern. I took their feedback and offered to make each teacher a binder with master copies of supplementary materials separated by unit. This would be my last sub-project for my counterparts: a binder for each teacher of supplementary materials directly tied to each of their English curriculum units and the specific content in the units.

Early in the fourth quarter, I began this sub-project by sorting the materials in the library by curriculum unit (the eight unit titles are basically the same for Classes 3 through 6). I then made copies of every relevant page and placed it in a plastic sleeve, and added it to each teacher's binder (two Class 3 teachers, two Class 4 teachers, two Class 5 teachers and three Class 6 teachers, for nine separate binders). So, for example: In the Class 5 unit titled "Instructions," a lot of the work focused on short, easy instructions for how to make crafts in the classroom (origami, art projects, cooking). I went through our "Arts, Sports and Music" section and copied pages that had short, easy instructions similar to those in their curriculum books (at our Class 5 students' levels) for origami, art projects, and cooking. I then made two copies of each of these pages, and put them inside the two Class 5 binders in the "Instructions" section. I finished labeling and organizing the binders a week before my service in Vaini ended, and placed them in the teachers' cubbies for use starting next year.

The most successful sub-project was the creation of the first library collection for our middle school. While sorting through the school journals, I realized that a lot of the texts found in them could be cut out and made into their own mini-books at an



appropriate level and length for our middle school students. The middle school teachers had long been asking me to provide them with books or materials for supplementary reading, as they didn't have their own library, and had limited access to our primary school library. I scoured through our collection of old school journals, pulling out texts at levels matching those of our middle school students. Once I had cut these out, I laminated each page and then bound the pages together. When I finished, I had been able to make almost 70 separate books for them. I handed these over in a box to our two middle school English teachers, who were ecstatic to receive them (see Appendix F).

These last few projects were my final contributions as English literacy resource specialist. As for the library itself, I felt that I had left it as well as I could. After two years of upgrades, with dozens of new bookshelves and cabinets and thousands of new books the school had a clean, colorful, well-organized library. Every book had a sticker on it designating which section it belonged to and/or what level of difficulty it was. There were posters over each section explaining how to maintain it. Students and teachers had practiced returning books to their proper places and organizing the library at the end of every single library visit. Students were excited for their library cleaning time and eagerly awaited the end of the quarter they were designated, when their whole class would spend an hour or so singing together while methodically cleaning the library according to the instructions on the poster. Teachers had taken over the borrowing system for each of their groups, recording names, dates and titles in a logbook at the end of every visit, and ensuring that students returned books at the start of the next visit. Several teachers had also gotten into the habit of borrowing new books themselves each week for research into

topics being taught as well as for using in their lessons. I felt that the Peace Corps volunteer who was replacing me would no longer need to take charge of the library space and could concentrate on other work, such as co-teaching, teacher training, and so on.

At the end of two years, I was ready to move on to my next project, working with Dr. Ruth at Waka Publications. Before the summer break, I had gotten back in contact with her. Another Peace Corps volunteer seeking a third-year project had been posted at Waka at the end of the prior year, and was set to finish her service in October. This volunteer had done excellent work with Waka, as an editor, author and photographer, and Dr. Ruth looked forward to my joining the Waka creative team after the current volunteer departed. With the Peace Corps Tonga Country Director's approval secured, I was ready to join the team as soon as my two-year service term in Vaini ended in November.

On the morning of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, my school held a farewell feast for me. The whole school (staff, students, PTA and parents, all of whom I now considered close friends) gathered in our main hall and I sat up front in the place of honor as people gave speeches. The principal gave a speech on behalf of the whole school and one of the teachers on behalf of the middle school. Our PTA Chairperson recounted in detail every project I had done with the community, including water tank donations, a basketball program, library development, after-school tutoring and social events; it meant a lot to me to be recognized for the work I had put in outside of school hours. Everyone joined in singing two hymns for the occasion, and then students from each class lined up to present me with gifts on behalf of their classmates and teachers. The middle school girls performed two dances, which were beautiful as well. I was overwhelmed with gifts and

appreciation and brought to tears by their kindness. After this, the collective part of the ceremony was ended and the students, who had come to school only for my ceremony, said their goodbyes and headed home. The staff and a few parents took me over to a classroom where they had set up a small feast. The principal, several of my counterparts, the PTA chair, and the parents each gave speeches on our relationship and how I had helped them or their students. It was intimate and heartwarming, and of course, in typical Tongan fashion, I left the feast with a full basket of food to go. By that evening I was fully relocated to my new home and ready to start my new job at the Waka Publications Programme in the University of the South Pacific.

## WAKA PROJECTS AND PEACE CORPS COMMITTEE WORK

In the first section of the previous chapter, “Primary and Middle School Service,” I explained how my initial expectations for my work at Vaini GPS and GMS were different from my Tongan counterparts’ expectations; I felt that the projects they initially expected me to do would not lead to sustainable development. Over time, however, I found that what was hindering me from establishing sustainable practices was not so much how I approached a project, but rather how I was approaching my counterparts. I learned to adapt my projects so that the practices I tried to develop were in-line with my counterparts’ cultural values, as well as their beliefs about teaching, to ensure successful partnerships.

Before I even arrived at Waka Publications, Dr. Ruth, the program lead, already had several projects lined up for me with clear expectations for my role in them, and clear goals for the projects themselves. This time, I would not be the one trying to establish sustainable practices, but rather learning from a team that had been doing so for years.

The goals and expectations that the team had for my work evolved as we got to know each other and they learned what I would and would not be able to do. In the following section, I describe my literacy development work at Waka by project goals, teamwork, and partnerships, rather than chronologically. Most of these projects lasted several months, and some continued even after I had left. Our work was delayed in February by the passage of Cyclone Gita, which damaged water, electricity, and internet systems around the island and caused extensive damage to some residential areas. The

university grounds, however, escaped with minimal damage and had re-opened by the end of the month.

In my third year with Peace Corps Tonga, I also actively participated in the Sight Word Books Committee, a Peace Corps volunteer committee engaged in literacy development projects. In the last section of this chapter, I examine the cultural appropriateness, pedagogical soundness, and sustainability of this committee's work.

### Waka Publications Programme Projects

Waka Publications, part of the University of the South Pacific's (USP) Institute of Education (IOE), had been a big book publisher for the Pacific Islands from the 1970s until 2010, but as the members of the original team at the Suva, Fiji campus retired, the program had gone dormant. Four years later, the Institute of Education (IOE) had decided to restart the program in response to the fervent need for books that the IOE's research branch identified in their ongoing L1 literacy and English literacy research projects around the Pacific. They recruited Dr. Ruth in 2014 for this venture, moving the Waka Publications Programme to the Tonga campus, and by the time I joined Waka in late 2017, she had already been leading the program for a few years.

One of the difficulties with restarting Waka Publications had been the lack of information on the original work. Aside from what could be found inside the covers of old books, there were no information databases of writers, artists, editors, graphic designers, or publishers. There was also little information on contracts, funding, grants,

and partnerships. There were also no written guidelines for themes, genres, or storylines. Without these, the new Publications team would have to start, basically, from scratch. They would need to establish sustainable practices which new team members could be trained in as veteran team members left. This time around, it was vital to establish databases and processes which would be transferable to new settings and new generations of Waka team members, while conserving the core principles and goals, as well as the history, of Waka Publications. This need to establish and maintain records of information was the driving force behind the first few projects I describe below.

In their first few years, the new Waka team had developed processes for the design, editing, illustrating, formatting, marketing, printing, sales, and shipping of publications, and compiled these in a digital folder. The Waka team needed these documents to be organized into a handbook that all team members could utilize. My first task at Waka was to assemble a draft of an official handbook that would eventually be distributed to all Waka Publications offices (at the time there were only three offices; the long-term goal was to have an office at every campus of the 12 member nations of the University of the South Pacific). The handbook would describe the process of book production from beginning to end; it would serve as a guide for current and new team members at Waka so that processes could be transparent and efficient.

Early on in the project we found that, even with a giant digital folder with dozens of documents, there were still some things missing. We then had to develop process documents for things like: steps for managing the monthly stock-take, steps for remastering an old book, procedures and forms for in-office sales, steps for creating and

sending out a media release, photograph consent forms, and guidelines for writing children's books. We were able to complete this project before the end of the academic year, and copies of the handbook were printed out and stored in each one of our Waka Publications offices.

Another major project I took on concerned the original Waka books. The program lead, Dr. Ruth, was concerned that there was no record of all of the original books produced by Waka Publications. Therefore, my project would be to compile digital copies of all of the Waka products, new and old, and to create an inventory with titles, codes, and other relevant information. My tasks for this project were to: 1) scan every page of every original book/poster or acquire available print files from our warehouse in Fiji, 2) create a digital folder and upload digital versions of every book/poster to it, 3) type up the text of each book in the folder, 4) develop an in-house coding system and assign an in-house code to every book, 5) train myself in using the Microsoft Access program, and 6) create a searchable information database (with Microsoft Access) to house the information on every Waka product ever published.

In the first round of data input, I recorded general information about each book to an Excel spreadsheet, like author, illustrator, and language. Then, I created the Microsoft Access database, transferred everything from the spreadsheet to the database, and added more detailed information, like ISBN numbers, editor, translator, sponsors, endorsements, and so on, obtained from the inside cover of each book. I then added a "reports" tab to the database, where a user could click to generate a current report which would sort the books by different criteria, like language, cultural context, author, and so

on. When the database was completed, I trained our Tonga campus team members in navigating and using the database.

As this project was completed, the team could begin a new set of projects; we had an ambitious goal to remaster a few dozen of the classic Waka books. Now that we had digital files for each book, images could be updated, with color and details added by our graphic artist, and our editors (the program lead, university staff, me) could edit the texts so that they would be relevant, contextualized and up-to-date. My other role in these projects was to serve as liaison with our graphic artist, to talk through the image edits with him, to scan and prepare the original images for him and then to store and pass on the updated images for book re-formatting, and finally to serve as second editor for the final drafts.

While the handbook, database, and remastery projects were all managed internally, Waka was also concerned with building partnerships with, and engaging, Pacific Islands communities. There were dozens of foreign organizations funding projects at any time around the South Pacific and in Tonga, including the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO and the Japanese, Australian, and Aotearoa New Zealand governments, to name a few. As a self-funding program, Waka Publications was keen on seeking outside funding for book projects, to ensure that they could be sold at affordable prices and reach the children they were meant for. Building partnerships with regional organizations was also vital for local buy-in, and to work together towards national goals and objectives. As for text and artwork, engaging local authors and artists meant that the final products were contextualized, both textually and visually, to the country or region they were written for.



On a more personal level, in a small country such as Tonga, the names and the work of local artists and authors would often be recognized on book covers, and create a sense of familiarity and empowerment for their readers.

A major project within these aims was the “Health Series.” The Health Series were ten books that Waka Publications created in partnership with the Tongan Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) development unit of the Tongan Ministry of Education. Our program lead worked tirelessly with a team including a MoH representative and members of the ECE unit, along with the authors, translators, and artists. The ten Tongan language books, five fiction and five nonfiction, were written for pre-school aged children and covered important health issues that affect Tongans: diabetes and obesity, healthy food preparation and healthy food choices, and healthy family environment. The project was funded in small part by the MoH and in large part by the Canada Fund. Once the books were completed and printed, each government preschool in the kingdom would receive a set of 100 books, or ten copies of each book (see Appendix H). The project also involved a long-term research component, where the preschool students would be tracked over the next few years in their literacy development and their understanding of the health issues described in the books. Over the course of the year I took on several tasks for this project, including writing illustration descriptions for the five fiction stories, writing out English drafts of the nonfiction texts (which were then translated to Tongan by a local educator) and writing illustration descriptions for these as well. Our team, which included our program lead, our project officer, our graphic artist

and me also met several times with the artist and with the translator as well as with our partners from the MoH and MoE.

Once the books sets were published, we had a small launch party to celebrate. The books could then be distributed to all registered ECE (Early Childhood Education) Centers around the country. The project officer and I spent several hours over a few days organizing packs of ten books each (one copy of each book), with color-printed and laminated teachers' notes included, all wrapped together neatly in plastic wrap. These were then dropped off at the Ministry of Education, who formally distributed them. The ECE unit lead sent us pictures of the kids checking out the new books with huge smiles on their faces; that was the greatest reward of all.

After the success of the Health Series project, our team met to discuss the possibility of a large project with the Inclusive Education (IE) team from the Ministry of Education ("Inclusive Education" is the name used in Tonga for "special education"). The IE team requested that Waka create and print several sets of flashcards for them, alphabet flashcards, common nouns, plants, colors, and so on. They also required certain specifications for IE: extra-large size, extra thick and/or durable card stock, 3D or raised edges around the images and letters (tactile print), and some kind of protective layer, coating or laminating on the cards. The team decided to start with Tongan alphabet flashcards sets for all of the country's IE centers.

Another project we were able to jumpstart, though not complete during my time, was the publication of several books written by a local teacher, who also happened to be my former counterpart from Vaini GPS. We had found several handmade "big books"

(A3 size) stored in a corner of our office; another university staff member had encountered them during a school visit the year before, and had asked the teacher if she would donate them to be adapted and published by Waka Publications. We found the books during our cyclone unpacking in February, and I excitedly explained that this teacher had been a friend and mentor for me at Vaini (the Class 5 teacher mentioned in the last chapter). We met with her in March, and explained that we hoped to edit and publish three of the books, with the teacher's permission; this would involve taking the original texts and digitizing them, then having an artist create professional images based on the teacher's original images and formatting the images and text into smaller A4 or A5 size books. The teacher expressed surprise and great joy at being honored in such a way and gave her hearty approval for editing and publication to go forward.

Two of these three books were in English, and the other one in Tongan. I spent several hours editing and re-editing the text for the two English books, and drawing up image descriptions for each page for our artist. Once these were done, our team was able to meet with a local artist who had recently finished another art contract with the university. We were hoping to have the book completed before I left in November, but were still waiting for the artwork when I left.

A third extensive project I worked on was the "Sustainable Environment Series." When I began at Waka, this series was still in the concept development phase. The program lead and the former Peace Corps volunteer, along with a visiting science tutor at the university, had developed the idea for the series, which would include texts on renewable energy, environmentally sound waste management, sustainable fishing and

sustainable farming. The texts were meant to be supplementary nonfiction texts for the Tongan science curricula for Class 6 to Form 3, or students aged 11-14. To contextualize myself on renewable energy projects, issues and goals around the South Pacific, I skimmed local reports, news articles, and videos on solar energy, wind turbine energy, tidal energy, use of fossil fuels, renewable energy projects, and so on. The three texts I finally spent my time researching, writing, editing and revising and collecting images for were on solar energy, fossil fuels, and plastic waste. In the final editing stage, two of our university science team members reviewed and edited the texts for scientific accuracy. I collected relevant images by riding around with our Waka camera and snapping the photos myself, and our project lead also contributed photos from her collection. I also had to find copyright-free images without attribution requirements. Our image editor edited the images. The texts were fully updated, peer-reviewed, and with images ready when I left; the next step would be to put everything together, format, and send to print.

While this project would not have a local author's name on it, the images and the content had been created specifically for the South Pacific context. In my time at Vaini, I had not come across any books on these specific science topics which were contextualized for the South Pacific. When our middle schoolers had been learning about solar energy, I had pulled out books for them which contained images of solar panels on the roofs of tall houses with pine trees in the background, or dark green acres of pasturelands washed by pale sunlight. None of these images fit what the students saw in their daily lives, even though there were now a dozen or so extensive solar panel projects in Tonga alone, and hundreds or perhaps thousands around the Pacific. Every few months

Pacific Island Nations leaders were meeting at forums and summits on climate change, which was having devastating and immediate effects on their homes, and new projects for environmental sustainability were being formed every few weeks. Yet none of this was addressed in our outdated and foreign books. The middle school English curriculum just did not have the space or time to cover this information, and the science curriculum provided only an introduction to the topics. This project was meant to begin filling those gaps, to support student learning.

One final project aiming to support student learning, though in another area, was our error analysis project. Dr. Ruth asked for my help in a research project on error analysis of Tongan students' written English; to our knowledge, this would be the first error analysis study of Tongan learners of English. The team was led by Dr. Ruth, whose doctorate degree is in Applied Linguistics, and included one of our teacher education lecturers and me. For this project, we would be collecting students' written answers from 900-1000 (about half of the nationwide total) Class 6 English exams from 2016, and identifying the most common errors in 6<sup>th</sup>-graders' written English on the exam. In the next stage of the project, we would synthesize this data, analyze it, and then provide suggestions for the teaching of EFL in Tonga, to address the causes of those common errors. During the data collection phase, as we each recorded sentence samples from physical copies of exams into Excel spreadsheets, our team met intermittently to chat about some of the error patterns we were identifying, and we began compiling a list of the most common errors.

At the conclusion of this data collection phase, our team met up to plan out the analysis phase. We discussed error categories and L1 influence, and spent hours analyzing several sentences to make sure we reached a consensus on how to classify problematic errors, as well as what not to classify. Before I left, I was able to record sentences and analyze errors from over 50 exams; these constituted hours of work, because we were recording five to ten sentences from each exam, and there were over 1000 exams to get through! The team realized that this was a far more daunting project than we had anticipated, and the work would continue long after I left.

In retrospect, I realize that I had approached the identification and analysis of errors mostly through intuition. Yet I had been introduced to the field of error analysis at HSU, in both English 435/635 and English 614. I knew, for example, that errors could be either “local” or “global,” as Douglas Brown referenced in *Teaching by Principles*, the English 435/635: Introduction to ESL/EFL course textbook. Local errors would be things like grammatical or mechanical errors, while global errors were concerned with meaning and clarity (412). In our analysis, we would be looking mainly at local errors, specifically grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors, as most of our text samples weren’t complex enough for students to commit global errors.

And in English 614: Teaching ESL Reading and Writing course, we had also explored error analysis, as described in the first section of the chapter “Pre-Service Coursework and Training.” In Ferris and Hedgcock’s textbook, the authors defined errors as “morphological, syntactic, and lexical deviations from the grammatical rules of a language that violate the intuitions or expectations of literate adult native speakers of that

language” (282-3). While the authors asserted that mature native speakers could identify errors intuitively (as we were aiming to do in our Tongan project), they also provided lists of well-documented common error types from both native speakers and ESL learners (285), as well as tables of error categories (304 and 315, mentioned earlier).

When my HSU Master’s International Program professor learned of this error analysis project from our monthly email interactions, she reminded me of a range of resources on error analysis, including Doolan and Miller (2012); Doolan (2014, 2017); Ferris and Hedgcock (2011); the annual summary of scholarship (including error treatment) in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*; and Michael Swan and Bernard Smith’s *Learner English: A teacher’s guide to interference and other problems*, which provides discussion of common errors made by English learners from over twenty different languages or language families. Unfortunately, I did not make use of these resources before I left Tonga. I realize now that using these well-researched and widely accepted categories as a starting point would have been helpful.

At the conclusion of our data collection phase, our team met up to plan out the analysis phase. We discussed error categories and L1 influence, and spent hours analyzing several sentences to make sure we reached a consensus on how to classify problematic errors, as well as what not to classify. Before I left, I was able to record sentences and analyze errors from over 50 exams; these constituted hours of work, because we were recording five to ten sentences from each exam, and there were over 1000 exams to get through! The team realized that this was a far more daunting project than we had anticipated, and the work would continue long after I left.

### Peace Corps Sight Word Books Committee

Although I had been a part of the Sight Word Books (SWB) committee since my first year of service, it wasn't until my third year that I began to participate in earnest. Our bi-monthly meetings were held at our partnering organization, the Tupou Tertiary Institute (TTI), and they were led by Dr. 'Ungatea Kata, the director of TTI.

The SWB committee saw itself as providing a necessary and urgent resource for developing English literacy at the primary level. PCVs observed the majority of our students falling behind in English as they reached the upper primary grades and middle school. We blamed this on what we believed to be unrealistic demands in the primary English curriculum units; at the very end of each unit were thematic lists of vocabulary words, grammar points, and even phonemes and morphemes the teacher was supposed to cover, along with the unit content, at some point in her lessons. For example, a Class 4 unit on writing about personal experiences, like traveling, might also require the teacher to teach the "fl" and "fr" blends, along with a decontextualized list of words including those blends. The Class 4 students might be expected to memorize words like "travel," "airplane," and "visit," while also supposedly learning how to spell and pronounce words like "frog" and "fresh" that were completely disconnected from their unit topic. PCVs found that teachers concentrated on drilling students in the topical vocabulary – which would be on their exams – and skipped over teaching the parts of language and grammar that were required in, but unrelated to, the unit content. Implied in this, we found that students were learning every new English word by simply memorizing its spelling and



pronunciation, often without explicitly learning about patterns, for example, “silent e” words. Our main purpose as the SWB committee was to design, publish, and provide books to fill these gaps, at no cost to the schools. The books were also copyright-free and available online, as well as on PCVs’ flash drives, as free .pdfs for printing.

In early 2018, with an influx of new members both from Peace Corps and from TTI, the committee began an overhaul to clean up and organize all prior work and re-establish a mission, goals and objectives. The committee leader and several members undertook a review and revision of all our digital files and updated official documents such as artist contracts and formatting guidelines. Our project was also in need of a new set of leveling guidelines for writing books and classifying old ones. The new guidelines needed to be based on an understanding of how Tongan children learned English as a foreign language, as well as an understanding of English phonetics. The guidelines that the committee had been using until that point were guidelines they had found online for writing leveled readers for native English-speaking children. They had also appended the *Dolch Sight Words List* (the most common words identified in English books for children) to the guidelines, indicating which words should be incorporated at specific levels. I volunteered to create the new guidelines, as I felt that my recent experience in creating and co-teaching a phonics program for Tongan English learners, and my familiarity with the Tongan leveled readers published by the MoE, made me a good candidate for the task.

The team which had founded the committee believed that the gaps in student understanding were in their limited vocabularies, and the way to address this was to

expose them to sight words as organized in the Dolch Sight Words list. This would be done through short, contextualized leveled readers, each focusing on introducing a few of the sight words at a time. Some of our early Sight Word Books, like *Fifita* (see Appendix I), for example, at first seemed to fit this purpose well, as it introduced several sight words from the Dolch list, maintained a simple and consistent tense, used words that were thematically related, and supported each word with an image of a local boy doing the action named, as well as being age-appropriate for upper-primary students. However, the committee had classified *Fifita* as a level “AA” book, which was the lowest of the SWB levels and was meant for our youngest readers (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, if their teacher was willing to introduce reading, or else 4<sup>th</sup> graders), and for readers who needed the most support. Over time, however, the committee came to realize that the limits were not just in how many words the students knew, they were also in what the students knew about words. One of the problems our students were encountering was that their strong decoding skills from their L1 could not be easily transferred to decoding English sight words, many of which have to simply be memorized for correct pronunciation. In fact, our students’ reliance on L1 decoding skills actually made it difficult for them to read through a text like *Fifita*, which included words that required quite a bit of background learning in English pronunciation to read correctly; the words “talk,” “hang,” “play,” and “read,” for example, all contain the vowel “a,” yet it is pronounced differently in each word. In simply flooding our students with more words to memorize, we had been using the same approach which we had criticized in the curriculum.

This issue of pronunciation, particularly of vowels, had been addressed in my English 435/635: Introduction to ESL/EFL course; we had reviewed work from Dr. John Schafer of Humboldt State University about the problems with the theory in English language instruction on “long” and “short” vowels. We learned that the terms were not only confusing because the labels “long” and “short” had no correlation with the length of time it would take to say the vowel in a word (for example, it does not take longer to pronounce the “a” sound in “hang” than in “play”). As mentioned above, a single vowel like “a” also did not have only two possible sounds in English, the “short” and “long” sounds, but rather several possibilities. This inconsistency in the pronunciation of vowels in English was a significant issue for our early English learners, and added to that was their struggle to pronounce new and unfamiliar consonants that did not exist in the Tongan alphabet.

In creating the new guidelines, I drew on the same logic that the Class 3 teachers and I had used to create the phonics program; I reasoned that our early readers would do best with vocabulary words grouped by sounds, and not just themes, *before* we could begin to introduce them to words on the Dolch list (especially words that were impossible to decode). As in the phonics program, words with vowel sounds more familiar to students’ L1 were introduced first. One more adaptation that I made specifically for Tongan learners was to first introduce words with consonants recognizable from the Tongan alphabet; the Tongan alphabet has only 17 letters, and the English consonants *b, c, d, g, j, q, r, w, x, y* and *z* are not present, so English words with these letters would not be introduced at beginner levels. I also distanced the new guidelines from the Dolch Sight

Word list, to allow our authors to create whole new sets of truly “beginner level” books, while our current SWBs would now be considered “emergent level.” Also, I used high-frequency word lists from the *Logic of English* program, whose aim is for students to “gain phonemic awareness, learn to read and write the 75 basic phonograms, and increase reading fluency” (“Foundations”); with their particular focus on “phonemic awareness,” these lists perfectly fit our goals for our beginner level SWBs. Once these guidelines were approved by the committee, I wrote eight new books (each book was 10 to 14 pages, with one to three sentences per page) over the next three weeks to provide examples for how books at each level should look.

In my final week at Waka, the Waka team members organized a farewell ceremony in my honor. Although my work had kept me mostly tucked away in our Waka corner office, I had still, over the year, gotten to know most of the people on campus, from our custodial staff and groundskeepers, to our receptionists and librarians, our tutors, lecturers and researchers, and our administrators and director; I had had time to gossip and joke with them, to sit for a cup of instant coffee or a bite of cake or to just smile and greet them as we passed in the halls. I was humbled at their smiling faces at the ceremony, and most of all by the kind words from Dr. Ruth, and from the campus director, about my work, and my presence, at the university in the past year.

Days later, I had my close-of-service ceremony with the Peace Corps staff and volunteers, who had all also come to be loved and trusted friends over the past three years. With this final tribute and farewell, and the honorary ringing of a bell to signal the official end of my service, I was ready to say goodbye.

## CONCLUSION

Once I was settled back in California. I had time to look back and reflect on my experiences. Of course, one event stood out from all the rest.

In February, when Cyclone Gita caused destruction throughout the island of Tongatapu, it also hit Vaini GPS and GMS. My Vaini friends and neighbors and I checked in through text to make sure that everyone was alright, comforting each other with a heartfelt '*ofa atu* ("love you"). At the time, I wasn't at first aware of the damage to the school, as my friends were reluctant to tell me of the extent of the destruction. I believe they worried that I would be devastated over the now-ruined books I had once cherished. But time and experience had changed my perspective.

When I visited the school site a few weeks later, it was not the damaged library, with a roof panel torn off and water damage to parts of the book collections that broke my heart. There were whole classrooms that had been blown to bits, and whole buildings completely and irreversibly wrecked. From my old neighbors at Vaini, I learned that most of the students and teachers were taking buses every single day to teach and learn in other schools that had fared better. They carried on, adapting with patience and resilience. As for me, well, I had long ago let go of the idea that the library was "mine," and if the community had repaired it once, twice, they would do it again, along with the rest of the school, their homes, and their village, as they had done for generations. I also knew that, when they were ready, they would pick up again where we had left off, with their knowledge of the use of books and resources for teaching, as well as student-centered

instructional approaches and literacy development strategies. Those things were not stored in a physical library, but rather catalogued in the teachers' minds, and my counterparts had, in my last year, accepted those new approaches and strategies because, really, they had come to accept *me*.

My friends in Vaini, and my time with them, had also taught me things that I kept in my heart. At Waka, I found the words for these values that I had learned written in the pages of a book:

***Tongan values***

*Feveitokai'aki* – to be considerate of others, to be helpful, to be kind and generous to others

*Tauhivaha'a* – to maintain and keep relationships that are in agreement with cultural values and customs

*Lototō* – giving, humility, love and caring

*Faka'apa'apa* – respect, humility and kindness (Maka 2)

These values, outlined in *Tā Kupesi: Emerging Themes and Methodologies from Educational Research in Tonga*, are the pillars of Tongan culture and society. My Tongan friends faithfully, and unfailingly, represented them.

I realized, too, that these values were what made Waka's work so successful. It dawned on me that many of the issues around sustainable development that I had struggled with in my projects at Vaini were things that the Waka team handled seamlessly. I saw parallels from the handbook of guidelines for Waka processes with the guidelines I had attempted to establish through library posters. Yet, while I had made all

of the decisions regarding those guidelines on my own, Waka's process guidelines had been created, over time, by the team, as they perfected the process and then identified the need for it to be streamlined. But those decisions took time, and they also involved input from every team member.

Another project where I saw similarities in my work and that of Waka was in Waka's partnership with the Inclusive Education (IE) team to create Tongan alphabet flashcards. Whereas I had decided, on my own, based on my own observations, to put together resource sets for my counterparts, in the flashcards project, the Inclusive Education team had come to Waka with their requests for these resources. Furthermore, the Waka team had met several times with the IE team members to gauge their needs, as they expressed them, and identify the very specific requirements that the IE team had for the flashcards.

And Waka's partnerships with representatives from the various ministries on various projects were personal, loving relationships. When our team hosted a book launch for the Health Series for example, our partner at the Ministry of Health presented several children's songs which he had written, sang and recorded with his family, about the content of the books. Weeks later, when our partner from the Ministry of Education delivered the booksets to the preschools, she sent us pictures and videos of the children singing, dancing, and reading their new books.

At Vaini, I had often let my pride, and my commitment to my ideals of sustainable development, guide my work. Over time, I learned that pride should come

last, and that consideration of others should guide my ideals, and this, alone, would be the key to sustainable work, to practices that would continue long after I was gone.

At the beginning of my second year, my counterparts had recognized affection in my concern for the Form 2 students, and, as a result, had placed me in a position to train their new English teacher. I had become close friends with the primary school staff over visits with snacks and gossip and time spent together out of school, and gradually they had accepted me as co-teacher during library time, for both reading activities and activities in other subjects. Although I had doubted the effectiveness of my organization posters, by the end of my second year, the teachers always brought the students at their appointed cleaning time, and, as we sat back and chatted, the 20 or so kids spent a joyful hour singing, dancing, dusting, sweeping and mopping, and lovingly cleaning off every single book.

In the final months of my third-year, the Peace Corps Tonga Language Coordinator asked for my help in updating a book called *TIKA ATU – Tongan Integrated Kultural Awareness Activities To U*. This handbook had been created a few years back for the purpose of introducing new volunteers to Tongan culture. However, the handbook had fallen out of use by the time my group arrived, so I had never seen it.

Now, as my three-year service came to an end, this handbook confirmed a lot of the things I had come to believe about Tongans and Tongan culture: “fostering a relationship with a business colleague or a client is seen as much more important than meeting a deadline or being on time” (5); “In Tonga, it is better to do something the ‘Tongan way’ and experience hardship or even failure than it is to gain success by doing



something in a manner which is seen as disrespectful to the culture” (21); “Tongans avoid conflict as much as possible and use indirect communication, via the methods of storytelling, the third-party approach, and lying, to handle interpersonal conflicts” (44); “Tongans are deeply passionate people, and they have other ways of expressing the strong emotions pulsing below the surface” (46).

I wondered if, perhaps, had I read this book three years before, I could have approached certain situations differently. Could I have dedicated more purposeful time and attention to building relationships? Could I have worried less about achieving theoretical goals of sustainable development?

Beyond what I had learned in this book, I wondered if I could have been a better volunteer. I had not always cross-checked my strategies for teaching, for advising my counterparts, and for resource-making against the current research I had been taught during my coursework. I had often relied on intuition, rather than on established practices and existing knowledge in the field of ESL/EFL teaching. I had even chosen to do things the way my Tongan friends preferred, at times, purposely ignoring what I knew from my studies.

These were heavy questions and heavy doubts. Yet, upon reflection, I realized that I had done well enough; I had learned the values of my neighbors, my counterparts, and my friends, through experience. More importantly, I had begun to consider that these values defined *me*, now, as well; I had, along the way, slowed down to listen, and I had begun to hear what Tonga had to say.

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## Appendix A: Team-Teaching Techniques

(Adapted from Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook's *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (2012))

### 1. Team-Teaching Technique **One: One Teach & One Observe**

- a. Team-teachers should agree on what type of information is to be gained by the observing teacher (the style of teaching, routine of classroom for new teacher, students' behavior, etc.).
  - i. Positives:
    - 1. Requires very little joint planning time.
    - 2. Provides opportunity for a teacher to learn about the students and observe the teaching style of his/her team-teaching partner (This method is recommended for PCV's first 2 or 3 weeks at school.)
  - ii. Negatives
    - 1. Can result in one of the teachers being relegated to the role of assistant.

### 2. Team-Teaching Technique **Two: One Teach & One Drift/Assist**

- a. One teacher has primary responsibility for teaching and the other circulates, unobtrusively assisting students as needed.
  - i. Positives:
    - 1. Requires little joint planning time.
    - 2. Provides opportunity for drifting teacher to learn about students' level of understanding and individual needs.
    - 3. Students receive timely individual help.
  - ii. Negatives:
    - 1. Drifting teacher can sometimes be a distraction.
    - 2. Students can become dependent on help from the drifting teacher.

### 3. Team-Teaching Technique **Three: Parallel Teaching**

- a. Teachers teach two groups of students the same information simultaneously.
  - i. Positives:
    - 1. Lowers the teacher-to-student ratio.
    - 2. Allows for heterogeneous or homogeneous groupings.
  - ii. Negatives:
    - 1. Both teachers must be knowledgeable in the subject and confident in their teaching abilities.
    - 2. Could be confusing if used for initial instruction.
      - \*\* A variation of parallel teaching might be useful for multi-level classes.

4. Team-Teaching Technique **Four: Station/Center Teaching**

- a. Each teacher teaches the content to one group, and subsequently to the other group. A third group might be working on their own.
- i. Positives:
  - 1. Each teacher can deliver instruction for content in which they have the greater knowledge and skills.
  - 2. Lowers the teacher-to-student ratio.
  - 3. Students have an opportunity to practice working on their own at the third station.
- ii. Negatives:
  - 1. Movement and noise level can be a distraction.
  - 2. Team teachers need to plan their content and timing to coordinate with each other.
  - 3. It takes time to train the students to work independently without being directly supervised.

5. Team-Teaching Technique **Five: Alternative Teaching**

- a. Used when several students need specialized attention; one teacher takes the responsibility for the larger group while the other works with the smaller group.
- i. Positives:
  - 1. Accommodates students who don't learn at the same rate as others.
  - 2. Allows for re-teaching, tutoring, or enrichment.
  - 3. Offers an opportunity to work with a few students on specific projects.
- ii. Negatives:
  - 1. Can be stigmatizing to the group who is alternatively taught, if the same students are always in the small group.
  - 2. Noise and movement level can be distracting.

6. Team-Teaching Technique **Six: Tag/Team Teaching**

- a. Both teachers are directing the whole class and working cooperatively to teach the same lesson.
- i. Positives:
  - 1. Greatest amount of shared responsibility.
  - 2. Allows for creativity in lesson delivery.
  - 3. Prompts teachers to try innovative techniques that neither professional would have tried alone.
- ii. Negatives:
  - 1. Most difficult to implement.
  - 2. Requires great amount of trust, commitment, and planning



## Appendix B: Vaini Library Before Upgrades



Top row: chapter books. Bottom rows: teacher resources and Tongan leveled readers.



Nonfiction section (using simplified Dewey Decimal color codes).



Top shelf: Tongan leveled readers. Bottom shelves: English leveled readers.



Children's picture books, organized by author.



## Appendix C: Vaini Library During Upgrades



Library space being used as main office during renovations.



Community members boarding up the windows around the top of the library.



Teacher helping to fix an old cabinet, donated to the library.



Teacher and student helping to paint and laminate the cabinet.



## Appendix D: Vaini Library After Upgrades



Left: Tongan Leveled Readers Collection. Right: Chapter Books Collection.



Left: "World Wall" and School Journals Collection. Right: Reference Collection.



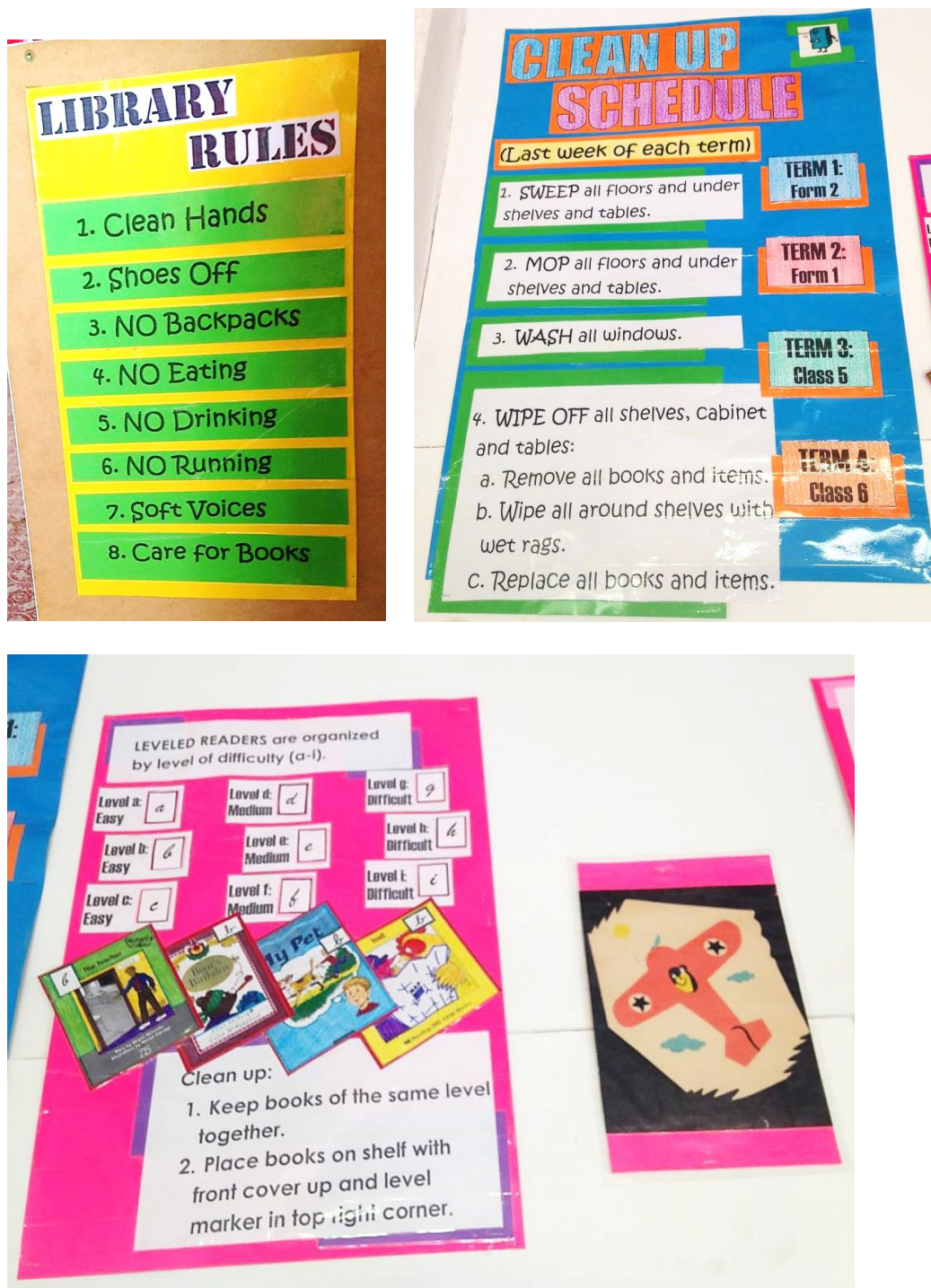


Left: Art Supplies and Board Books Collection. Bottom: English Leveled Readers Collection.

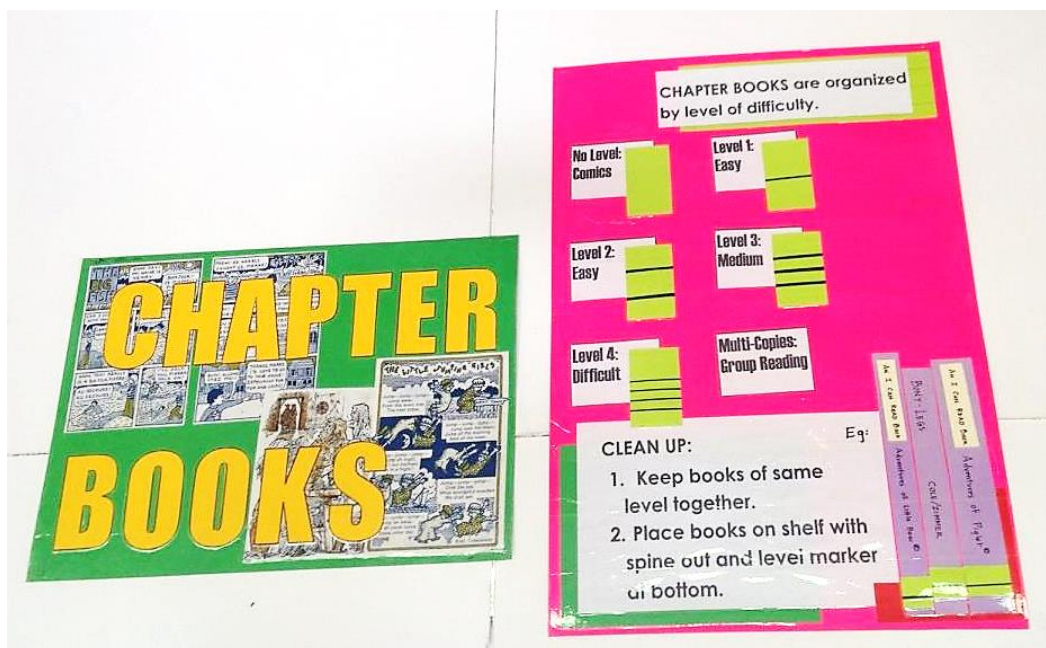


Children's Picture Books Collection (authors A-E).

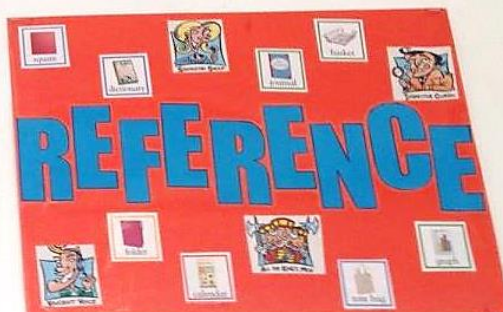
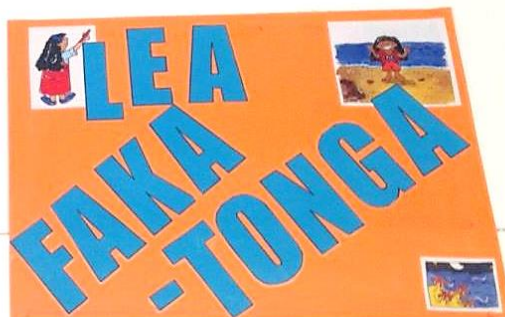
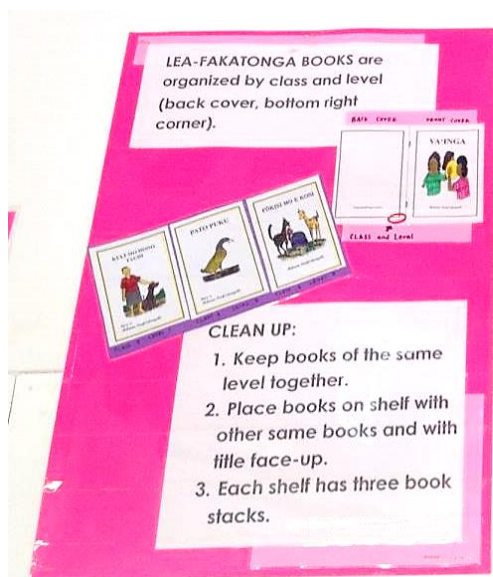
## Appendix E: Library Organization Posters











## Appendix F: Books for Classroom Libraries



Laminated leveled readers and Sight Word Books for teachers' classroom libraries.



Laminated short stories for the middle school library.



## Appendix G: Waka Publications Catalogue

(Below are sample pages from the catalogue showing Tongan and English titles)

**TONGAN LANGUAGE**

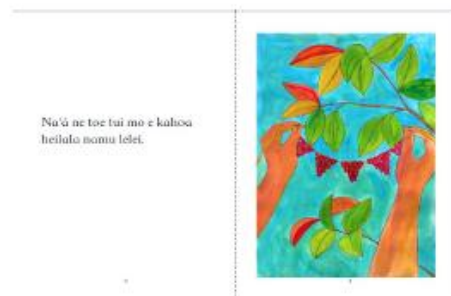
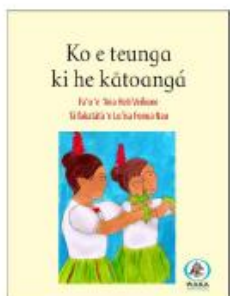
**Mata'itohi FakaTonga.** TOP\$10.00 [A5, 20pg] for Level 0 Pre-Primary School. Tongan language alphabet with marine themed pictures demonstrating initial use of the letter. ISBN: N/A



**Ko e ngaahi fo'i fā e hongofulu.** TOP\$10.00 [A5, 12pg] for Level 0 Pre-Primary School. Tongan language counting book 1-10. ISBN: N/A



**Ko e teunga ki he kātoanga.** TOP\$10.00 [A5, 12pg] for Level 1 Primary School year 1-2. Palu's mother is dressing her in preparation for a dance festival. ISBN: 978-982-9173-17-1



**When there's rain.** TOP\$14.00 [A4 landscape, 24pg] for Level 4 Intermediate year 7-8. With geography related colouring-in activity. A young god travels on the clouds to learn about rain, snow, ice, and hail, in many different continents. ISBN: 978-982-01-0939-1



### NON-FICTION

**Shapes are everywhere!** TOP\$10.00 [A5 landscape, 12pg] for level 0 Pre-Primary School. With notes for family/educators. Introduces simple shapes: circle, square, triangle, rectangle, diamond. Provides pictures of everyday objects for shape recognition. ISBN: 978-982-9173-10-2



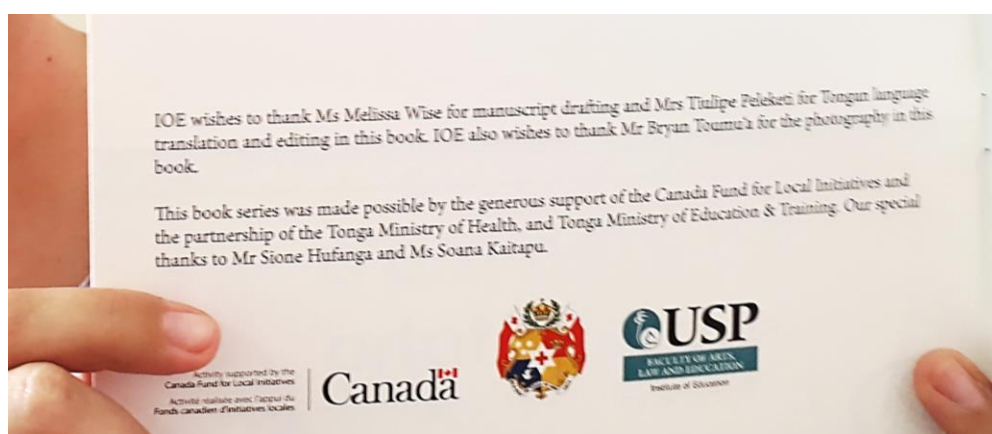
**Colours in my garden.** TOP\$10.00 [A5 landscape, 16pg] for level 0 Pre-Primary School. With notes for family/educators. Introduces 11 common colours names and tropical garden plants which show those colours. Encourages discussion and early observation and classification skills. ISBN: 978-982-9173-13-3



## Appendix H: Waka Publications Health Series



Completed Health Series books.



My name included in the acknowledgements in the five nonfiction books.

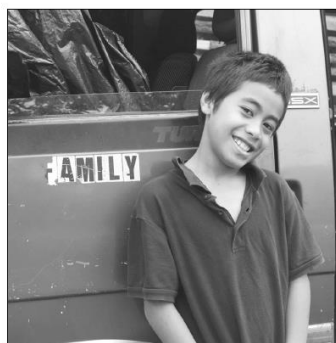


Appendix I: *Fifita* Sight Word Book

## Fifita



Written By Abraham C.R.  
Pictures By Samantha B.



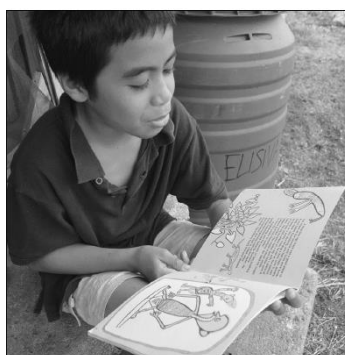
Fifita.

1



Fifita sits.

2



Fifita reads.

3

Book cover and sample pages 1-3 from the Sight Word Book *Fifita*.